















BY  
GERALD BULLETT

*The History of Egg Pandervil* (1929)

*Nicky Son of Egg* (1929)

*Marden Fee* (1931)

*The Quick and the Dead* (1933)

*The Jury* (1935)

*The Testament of Light:*  
*An Anthology*

THESE ARE BORZOI BOOKS, PUBLISHED BY  
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THE SNARE  
*of the*  
FOWLER



THE SNARE  
*of the*  
FOWLER

*by*  
GERALD BULLETT



NEW YORK · ALFRED · A · KNOFF

1936

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## PREFATORY NOTE

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THIS novel is a modern-life adaptation of an ancient and admired story: that of Oedipus the King, of whom it was foretold before birth that he would slay his father and marry his mother. In *The Snare of the Fowler*, in which (as in the tragedy by Sophocles which inspired it) Coincidence plays the master-hand, we see a man and a woman of present-day England becoming gradually and innocently entangled in the snare of a malignant destiny.

G. B.





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TO  
AN IMMORTAL SHADE  
WHOSE NAME MY PEN REFUSES

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*As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and  
as the birds that are caught in the snare, so  
are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when  
it falleth suddenly upon them.*

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**THE CHARACTERS AND SITUATIONS in this work  
are wholly fictional and imaginary, and do  
not portray and are not intended to portray  
any actual persons or parties.**

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## PART ONE

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### PREPARATION

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1. A NEW LIFE
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## A NEW LIFE

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BECAUSE of what she knew, because of what she didn't know, the thought of her mother's marrying again was unspeakably repugnant to Drusilla Moore. It was a shadow cast upon the brightness of this April afternoon, and a shadow the more dreadful for being intermittent. Sitting in deck-chairs on what was proudly known as the Long Pier, these two had shared for an hour, though without knowing it, that illusion of timelessness, that sense of escape (whether from reality or into it, who knows?), which sometimes visits and makes sufferable our mortality. Each was supposed to be usefully occupying herself; but Mrs Moore's crochet lay neglected in her lap, and the copy of Longfellow with which Drusilla had been indulged was still unopened. Each alone with her secret thoughts, yet to some extent insulated from them by the enveloping sensation of sea and sky, they sat side by side, immersed in a golden haze. It was a moment of such serenity as neither had known for many months, and such as neither, if challenged, would have admitted to be possible. It was like the beginning of a new life.

Mrs Moore was no longer, by the standards of her day, a young woman; but her features retained a youthful softness of contour and freshness of complexion, and her luxuriant

hair, now half-hidden under a bonnet, showed no trace of greying. A widow who had only just discarded her weeds, she still ventured no further on the road to emancipation than a Quakerish grey would take her. Drusilla, who looked seventeen and was younger than she looked, was dressed in a style somewhat more mature than even her apparent age, and her hair, rich and brown like her mother's, was already "up". She wore a straight-brimmed straw hat, a stiff white collar, a starched shirt-blouse, and a long full skirt of blue serge. A broad leather belt encircled her waist, and corsets confined, without concealing, the precocious abundance of her bosom. In her own estimation, and for a sufficient reason, she was no longer a girl; yet a girl she was, an ordinary, attractive, middle-class girl, living in the last decade of Queen Victoria's reign, and, but that Fates had designed an extraordinary destiny for her, a typical product of the times. That she knew her present situation to be unique was the most conspicuous remnant of the trouble; but time would perhaps mend even that, for her elastic imagination was already engaged upon the task, set her (unwittingly) by Mamma, of pretending that what had happened to her had not happened to *her*, but to somebody else, a girl in a story. Pretending, a pretending untainted by self-deception, had been a favourite indulgence in her early childhood; and now, since the series of events that had pitchforked her into maturity, she was on the way to becoming an adept in the art. The gift carried with it the penalty of possessing an inconveniently sharp eye for the pretences of others. For many months now, her mother had been pretending—gallantly, heroically pretending—that she, Drusilla, was not in deep disgrace. It was all part of a wise affectionate policy, and Drusilla, even while she adored her mother for pursu-

ing it, shrewdly suspected that another had been its true author, and that that other was on the point of claiming his reward. A year ago Drusilla had been a simple-hearted child, not capable of questioning appearances and still less of nosing out deceptions. But much may happen in a year, and she was now, in experience, many years older. To recover for her the innocent vision of young girlhood, while retaining, purged of its bitterness, the knowledge she had had thrust upon her: this, and nothing less, was the problem with which life was confronting her unconscious wisdom, her veiled divinity. Drusilla saw her mother's benevolent game and was passionately resolved to help her play it. Subtle in nothing else, she was subtle in this; naturally acquiescent wherever her love was engaged, she yielded in this an acquiescence that was complete and effortless, since what was required of her went step by step with her own desperate need.

Through half-shut eyes, the day being so bright, Drusilla stared at the sea. Its vast expanse offered room for her questing spirit; its movement eased her nameless hunger; its multitudinous rhythm, one in many, many in one, ran golden in her veins, subduing her heart's beat to the measure of a quiet dream. But, from time to time, jerking her roughly from this dream, came the obscene picture of her mother re-married. She had said nothing quite to the point, but Drusilla all too clearly perceived the drift of her mother's thoughts. Darling Mamma was feeling her way towards telling Drusilla the secret that Drusilla had guessed five days ago (suddenly, for no reason, a fear translated into a conviction, a conviction that fell into place and made the puzzle clear). It was unlike her to take so much trouble, unlike her to approach her purpose by so circuitous a route,

and the very fact that she did so was evidence that Drusilla was no longer a child. Soon, perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, she would be saying: "How would you like to have a new father, darling? Don't you think it would be nice?" Drusilla had read some such speech as this in a shabby-looking novel found on the landlady's shelves, and she lived in dread of hearing it from Mamma's lips. Not that she disliked Dr Hewish more than other men. Dr Hewish had been kind to her, and it was possible, just possible, that his kindness was disinterested. But Dr Hewish and Mamma . . . and *that!* Drusilla knew at last what marriage meant, or so she imagined; she knew the worst, for so she thought of it, being convinced that nothing viler was possible or conceivable; and that Mamma should of her own free will contemplate the unspeakable gave a deep shock to a sensibility already lacerated. A new life lay ahead, and all that was ugly in the past must be forgotten: so much had Mamma made clear. Fortified by this promise, Drusilla had looked hopefully for a future from which men, and all thought of men, with the single exception of her brother Philip, would be utterly excluded. Philip, being only a boy, didn't count; but Dr Hewish certainly and shamefully counted, amiable and old though he was, or seemed to be.

"I wonder if Phil is enjoying himself," remarked Drusilla: though her thoughts were still of Dr Hewish.

"Ah!" said Mrs Moore. Beginning as a drowsy expression of contentment, this response somehow contrived before its end to become invested with a more sentimental significance. For sons were a problem, as well as daughters. "Dear little Phill" the mother continued. Her own tone of voice had reminded her to be anxious. "I do hope he's

safe, Drusilla. Can you see the boat still, dear?"

Drusilla scanned the horizon. "I think it'll be that one, mamma, over there," she said, pointing.

"He couldn't come to any harm, could he?" asked Mrs Moore.

To be appealed to like this was a further tribute to Drusilla's mature status: a dramatic break with the tradition of mother-knows-best. Part of her rejoiced in the change. Another part, remembering its cause, sighed for childhood again. But it was not in human nature, certainly not in Drusilla's nature, to decline promotion.

"Why, no, mammal!" she said, with prim enthusiasm. "Not in so calm a sea as this." I am twenty-five, she pretended, and Mamma is a silver-haired old lady, very small and frail. Philip, my little boy, has gone out in a boat to fish. We are both rather anxious about him, but I must hide my fears from dear Granny. "The boatman looked so *very* seaworthy, don't you think?" she added, consciously. A good performance: she had enjoyed it. But now nature broke in. "I don't expect he'll catch any fish, though." She was a schoolgirl again.

Mrs Moore seemed surprised. That Philip should fail in anything he attempted was a suggestion not lightly to be entertained. "Oh, don't you, dear? I do hope so. He'll be so disappointed if he doesn't."

"I shan't, very," said Drusilla audaciously.

"Darling, how can you be so unkind?"

Drusilla laughed, slightly shamefaced. "Well, it's like this, mamma. I shall be sorry for Phil if he doesn't catch anything, and sorry for the fishes if he does."

Mrs Moore raised her eyebrows. Divided between surprise, irritation, and amusement, she stared at her daughter



as though she half-expected to see the child turn into a unicorn or a salamander. "Really, darling, what *have* you been reading? Don't you know they were sent for our food? I hope my little girl's not becoming a Socialist."

Animals and fishes, they were all sent for our food: sent from heaven, as it were, by God's own hand. That was why one said grace at meals. Had the fish been aware of its destiny, and volunteered for it, the slow evolution of the species from something not only more simple but less agreeably edible would have argued in a creature a self-effacing devotion to human interest, and a perseverance in well-doing, hardly excelled by the Christians themselves, even in the nineteenth century. But no, it was God's doing, and to God be the praise. He commanded order from chaos and sowed the seed upon the waters; built up, cell by cell, a complex organism; devised, and fitted, gills for breathing, eyes for seeing, tails and fins for locomotion, and an elaborate system of individual propagation: and all with a single eye to us and our dietary. Unformulated because unquestioned, this was Mrs Moore's assumption; and it is a theory that still commands general assent, except among certain backward races.

Though she figures in our chronicle as an unremarkable woman, in one respect at least, in her capacity for faithfully following a lead, Mrs Moore had achieved a kind of greatness. Drusilla did her no more than justice in thinking her heroic. Fortified by the example and counsel of one whose sagacity she recognized without fully understanding it, in the great crisis of her own and Drusilla's life she had proved herself equal to events. Hysteria had threatened and the idea of vengeance had allured her: she had conquered the first, repudiated the second. "Above all," said Dr Hewish,

"we must help her to forget. Interviews with the police," he had added with suave irony, "are perhaps not the best way to do that." She had carried out his instructions with a soldierly thoroughness, and now, in the peace of this golden afternoon, all troubles past, all passions spent, she tasted the first-fruits of her reward. For at last she was again at ease with Drusilla, and need no longer make an effort to appear so. She was at ease again, setting her right, forming her character, keeping a sharp benevolent eye on her opinions.

"Of course, mamma," said Drusilla, quick to notice, if slower to resent, the new-old patronizing note in her mother's bland voice. Of course she knew that fishes were sent for our food: she was not, after all, an ignorant girl. "But still . . ." She turned from the subject with a laugh. Her thoughts were elsewhere: she remembered, with a little stab at the heart, something she was both dutifully and expediently resolved to forget.

"But still what?" Mrs Moore prompted her.

Drusilla did not answer, and a gleam of nervous anxiety began to appear in the questioning glance her mother fixed on her. Prodding at the ground with her parasol, and staring at the progress of this operation with a false intentness, Drusilla was painfully aware of the moments passing, the silence persisting. She must speak. She could not speak.

"Mamma," she said.

"Yes, dear?"

"Mamma, I want to ask you something."

"Well?" The voice was edged with a reluctant hostility. "I'm listening, child."

"Mamma, it's about the baby,"

Mrs Moore stiffened. "Well?"

"It died, didn't it?" said Drusilla.

"My dear, you know that. Mother told you."

"Yes, mamma. That's what I meant. But, what I mean, did it die, you know, afterwards? Or was it dead all the time?"

"The poor little thing was stillborn," said Mrs Moore severely. "Yes, that means born dead. And in the circumstances, darling, it was all for the best." Receiving no response from Drusilla she added, with a touch of exasperation: "Wasn't it, Drusilla?"

"Yes, mamma," agreed Drusilla.

"And now," said Mrs Moore, with an air of obliterating the subject for all time, "that's all past and done with, and we'll never mention it again, either of us, to a living soul. Not to a living soul," she repeated firmly. "Isn't that Phil's boat coming in, dear? I feel sure it is!"

Dead was dead: it could make no difference when. But somewhere in the obscurity of her young bewildered being Drusilla suffered a pang and the echo of a pang, and wished, in vain, something she dared not utter, even to herself.

But with all their smiles and chatter about Philip, and in spite of their common dedication to forgetfulness, both mother and daughter glanced back to that evening of terrifying apocalypse, now half a year away.

The scene was the girl's bedroom, and the persons concerned were Drusilla herself, in bed, and burning with embarrassment; Dr Hewish, a round dry urbane gentleman of forty or so, seated by the bed; and the stricken mother, comely and curvilinear, who stood clasping and unclasping her hands and shooting glances of despair and entreaty at daughter and doctor.

"Are you quite, quite sure, doctor?"

He answered her over his shoulder. "Yes, yes. Sure enough. Now," he added, turning back to his patient, "just one more question, my dear. . . ."

Drusilla's mother, whom, in person if not in character, Drusilla gave promise of one day resembling, was by nature a placid woman. Though her figure was in danger of being called "comfortable," she had every reason to believe herself too young for perpetual widowhood. To her two children she was a mother fond to the point of possessiveness; but a redeeming indolence had prevented her affection from establishing a tyranny over them. She was not, moreover, in the habit of meeting trouble half way, and nothing, except her own fear (too fantastic for belief), had prepared her for the revelation that her not yet thirteen-year-old daughter was with child.

"There must be some mistake," she protested weakly.

The magnitude of the disaster overwhelmed her wits. She stood fluttering and gaping, unable to articulate another word. If the doctor had been ready to open his arms for her support she would have swooned, but the doctor was otherwise occupied and that moment of giddiness passed, to be succeeded by a gush of angry and terrified emotion. That curious lump under the bedclothes was her own flesh and blood, her daughter; and this daughter . . . oh what am I to do, her spirit wailed. The sly deceitful creature! The poor betrayed darling! She swayed between these alternatives. Impossible to believe herself the mother of a precocious wanton, but equally impossible that a girl not stupid to the point of imbecility should not have been able to take care of herself. She could almost, with an effort, have forgiven the stupidity, knowing it to be grounded in an ignorance which she herself had fostered; but the secrecy

was something she could never forgive. Hadn't she always made a friend of her children? Hadn't she always relied on them to run to her with their troubles? Of the wretched Lucian (whose guilt she took for granted) she could not bear to think: in her imagination he was no longer human. But why had not Drusilla denounced him to her mother? Why must she wait to have the hideous truth dragged out of her? The ugliest interpretation of that silence was luckily one that the evidence failed to support; for it was, after all, in the stammered half-sentences let fall by Drusilla herself, unaware in her innocence of their bearing on her situation, that the first clue had been found.

She came nearer the bed. It exasperated her to observe that Drusilla was hiding her face in the pillow. Knowing the child, she had every reason to despair of getting anything out of her: Drusilla had the maddening habit of going dumb in moments of crisis. Mrs Moore was resentful as well as bewildered: obscurely, and with some justice, she felt that she was not the sort of woman to whom this sort of thing happened. Yet it had happened. Amiable and easy-going, she was being invaded by emotions that were far beyond her range of expression, whether in speech or act. She was not equal to making a scene, yet not to make a scene left her emotionally frustrate and added a sense of personal inadequacy to her unhappiness. Mild though she commonly was, however, she had to force herself to speak mildly to Drusilla.

"Listen, dear. We're not angry with you. We want to help you." Meeting with no response she added sharply: "Look at me, Drusilla. There's no sense in sulking."

Drusilla, for one moment, emerged from her white trance, peering guardedly at her mother from under long

dark lashes. She was frightened, watchful, non-committal, like a hurt animal. It was like that other time, soon after her twelfth birthday, when she thought she was going to bleed to death, and Mother had had a Quiet Talk with her and told her to be a Brave Girlie. It was like that time, only worse. The Quiet Talk was to be followed, Mother had promised, by a talk still more quiet, when matters very serious, and oh so secret, would be expounded to Mother's Girl. This further revelation was still to come, and meanwhile the sole addition to Drusilla's knowledge was that when you thought you were bleeding to death you were not really bleeding to death, and so it was nothing to be frightened about. But the new terror was worse than the old had been. It was less definite. It was like a whisper. It was like something growing inside you. Indeed it was just that: something growing inside you. Mother had sent her to bed early, and then, coming an hour later to tuck her up and say good night, had brought Dr Hewish with her. Dr Hewish had hair on his hands. His skin had a rather funny smell. His face was blunt and his eyes went through you, but his smile was friendly and you couldn't be afraid of him. When he began his examination Drusilla felt ashamed, for to be touched like that reminded her of Uncle Lucy and the horridness she had never spoken of to anyone. But Dr Hewish wasn't at all like Uncle Lucy: in a cheerful if rather absent-minded way he had asked a series of questions: about what she was doing at school, and did she play hockey, and what books she liked best, and how long was it since this and that had happened to her. He had listened with equal patience to all her answers, nodded and smiled from time to time, and would spare no attention for Mother. And presently—Drusilla hardly knew how it

happened—the name of Uncle Lucy had somehow slipped into the conversation, and the questions began converging to a point. And then, suddenly, she had gone dumb.

Lucian was not a real uncle. But he was so old a friend of Drusilla's parents, and so much in evidence, that he had always seemed like one of the family. Drusilla couldn't remember a time when she had not known Uncle Lucy. Years ago she and her little brother Philip had accepted him once and for all as the genial friendly devoted fellow he was. He would play with them, bath them, put them to bed, take them to the Zoo, anything. Nothing was too much trouble for him; nothing ruffled his serene temper. And since Father's death Mother had often said what a comfort it was that she had Uncle Lucy to turn to for help and advice. She had not said this lately: she had said, on the contrary, how queer it was that Uncle Lucy never came to see them now. Not since the summer had he been to see them. At such remarks Drusilla wished herself dead. Death was frightening enough: to be put into a coffin and screwed down, to be eaten by worms in the cold grave. Death was ugly and dreadful, but not so ugly and dreadful as having to say what Uncle Lucy had done to her, that summer afternoon in Wilbury Woods.

Having gained her daughter's attention, Mrs Moore gazed at her with a mournful solicitude which a forced smile did little to modify.

"Now, darling, listen. We want you to tell us all about it. All about Uncle Lucy." Becoming suddenly aware of Dr Hewish, the poor woman felt herself blushing. Doctors were not quite like other men, but still . . . And besides Dr Hewish was her friend as well as her medical adviser. . . .

Drusilla turned her eyes away. Away from Mother. Away from Dr Hewish. She half-believed she could have answered the questions if Mother hadn't interfered. But with Mother watching, smiling, coaxing, no answers would come.

"Try to remember, darling. Try to tell Mother. . . ."

Drusilla pretended to be asleep . . . and then, by some miracle, she nearly was asleep. She lay rigid under the bed-clothes, listening and lapsing. With intervals of silence the voices in the room tinkled on. But they were no longer speaking to her. Without opening her eyes she looked down a long long tunnel, and at the further end of the tunnel, very small and queer, stood Mother and Dr Hewish, talking together in remote small voices. Something mysterious had happened to her. She was going to be very ill. They were planning to take her away, far away, and hide her. The sea-air. The change. Say nothing, nothing at all. Far best to say nothing. Leave it all to me, dear lady. The tunnel vanished, but the voices went on. The dark room was full of eyes, crowding in upon her swollen nakedness. If I could only escape from my horrible body, she thought—into the sky, into heaven. Gentle Jesus meek and mild. No Mother. No Uncle Lucy.

"From the medical point of view," remarked Dr Hewish complacently, "her condition is most satisfactory. Yes, I'm very pleased with her. Come, Mrs Moore!" He seized her arm just above the elbow and pushed rather than led her from the room.

Arrived downstairs they went into conference.

"Now, my dear madam!" The doctor wagged an admonitory finger. "We must make up our minds to be very sensible."



His assumption of authority confronted her. "Tell me what I must do," she said meekly, controlling her tears. . . .

"Sitting in the sunshine, their eyes idly scanning the blue horizon of the sea, both mother and daughter recalled that evening. Far away and long ago as it now was, so much having happened since and so many new faces and places been seen, its power to affright them had waned almost to vanishing point; but they were glad, none the less, when Philip returned from his fishing, to please and distract them with his account of the afternoon's adventures. He had caught three small haddocks, which he proudly exhibited, and a mackerel, which he had given to the boatman.

"You gave him the mackerel!" cried Mrs Moore. "Why, you funny boy, that was the choicest of the catch!"

The haddocks, silver and slippery, were still alive, twisting and turning in their captor's bucket, and making the most of rather less than a quart of sea-water. Three pairs of human eyes peered down at them.

"They 're lovely ones, Phill" said Drusilla loyally.

"I caught *him* first," said Philip, pointing. "And then the mackerel, and then him, and then him. Tom said I'd done very well."

"Tom?" echoed Mrs Moore, enjoying his enthusiasm. "Is that the boatman?" Noticing that Drusilla had lapsed into silence, she suspected an aloofness which her love could not tolerate, and an instinct to tease, to administer a pinprick of pain, stirred in her. "Your sister, if you please, is *sorry* for the fishes."

Drusilla felt the colour of shame welling into her face. She would not look at her mother, and she was almost too much embarrassed to meet Philip's look; but she did meet it, a look of inquiry, cool, friendly, considering. She smiled

at him, in deprecation of her mother's remark and her own silliness that had provoked it. "That was only my nonsense, mamma," she said. "It must have been frightfully exciting, Phill"

"Great sport!" agreed Philip.

He glanced again into the bucket. He was in the bucket, floundering about, nosing down into the water with his silver tail swishing. Then he slid down into the dim-lit tank of the sea. Shafts of light from the day above trickled through the dark-green gloom; crystal bubbles rose up in a long spiral; at the bottom there was firm sand, and large embedded rocks, and feathery green plants bending with the current.

"And now, my dears," said Mrs Moore, "there's something I want to tell you."

Drusilla's heart stood still. So it was coming: nothing could avert it. She had for so long anticipated the announcement that she could almost have pitied Mrs Moore for not being aware of her awareness. Poor Mother, she knew nothing, she was blind, whereas to Drusilla (thought Drusilla, with what would have been arrogance had it not been innocence) everything about Mother was hideously clear. Because of what she knew, because of what she didn't know, Drusilla saw everything; but her knowledge was darker than ignorance and her vision less revealing than blindness, because, while seeing everything, she saw it only in the flat. To that other dimension, of the spirit, her sight did not penetrate. She did not know that even as she, Drusilla, trembled to hear her mother's avowal, so her mother, with all her outward complacency, trembled in making it. So much, so much, depended on what the children felt! And especially on what Drusilla felt, Drusilla

who was so lamentably, so tragically, grown-up!

"Dr Hewish has sold his practice and bought another one, the other side of London."

"Has he?" said Philip. He was not interested.

"And we're all to go and live with him there," said Mrs Moore, her eyes fixed on Drusilla. "You'll like that, won't you?"

"Yes, mamma," said Drusilla limply.

Mrs Moore forced a smile. "He's going to be your new father," she pronounced painfully. No one answered her: a frozen silence enveloped the bright day. "So that's that," said Mrs Moore, with sudden briskness. She got out of her chair and gathered up her crochet. "Come, children, we must be getting back to tea."

She turned and began walking away. Drusilla followed her.

"Come on, Phil!" called Drusilla over her shoulder.

When the boy caught up with her she exclaimed, guiltily: "Oh Phil, where are your fishes?"

Trying to temporize, he glared into his empty bucket. "I must have thrown them back. Pouring the water away," he explained disingenuously.

"Why did you do that? You shouldn't have."

"I suppose I just felt like it," said Philip. "Easily catch 'em again tomorrow."

Both fell into silence, wondering what their mother would say. But Mrs Moore was full of her own thoughts.

## COUSIN ADRIAN

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WITH a noiselessness characteristic of her (for she had the strange gift of appearing suddenly from nowhere, like an embodied thought), Sophia Minty came into the room where Drusilla was standing, and laid a gentle commanding hand upon her shoulder. The gesture brought to her own notice a fact she would perhaps have preferred to forget: that Drusilla was nearly a head taller than herself. She was fond of her pupil and admired her handsomeness, but affection had had to struggle against an unconfessed resentment of her own smallness and insignificance. At first, three years ago, when the family first settled in Kewbury Strand, it had been possible to tell oneself that with all her bloom Drusilla was awkward, overgrown, a great healthy lump of a girl, sudden in her manners and coltish in her movements. "My dear child, you must try to have some poise, some self-control!" But now—alas, yet how gratifying!—either by trying or by some less conscious and more vital process she had achieved the desired poise. Her limbs had learned grace; her opulent loveliness was held in the leash of a quiet self-assurance; she moved easily, with an unstudied beauty, where formerly she had seemed to leap and plunge. Miss Minty was proud of the change in her, trying to recognize her own handiwork in it. She was also a little afraid of the

young woman so royally emerging from girlhood. Afraid not cravenly, and not for herself, but because she discerned, behind this new maturity of manner, a spirit wayward and passionate and for ever young. If only, thought Miss Minty, she meets the right husband: kind, masterful, not too young!

Drusilla stood by the window, staring out. Her eyes saw the broad river that flowed past the house, a barge drifting by, the fields of the further bank, and a road-bridge spanning the river five hundred yards to the north. The tide had gone out, leaving shelves of glistening mud; and on the willow-shaded island that rose in the middle of the river, nearly opposite this front window, forty or fifty swans were taking their ease, basking in the sun, sleeping, or opening and closing their wings like white umbrellas. All these things were present to her sight and she enjoyed them, as she always did; but her thoughts were far away, she could not have said where.

"Drusilla," said Miss Minty, "your mother is asking for you. She wants you to go out with her."

Drusilla turned, reluctantly waking from her daydream. "Where is she going, Miss Minty?"

After three years in the new household Drusilla had so far outgrown her distaste for the idea of Mamma's second marriage as to have forgotten that she had ever experienced it. The events of that earlier epoch were shadowy and far away, like things heard in an old story. Dr Hewish was an unobtrusive husband. Easygoing, undemonstrative, and much occupied with his private and professional interests, he had the air of wishing you to suppose him the privileged guest or the gratified host of his wife and her daughter, rather than the head of a household of which they were

members. As a stepfather he exhibited what would have been recognized as the very flower of tact had it been anything but artless. So far as human sense could discover he was quite unaware that there existed a situation calling for special care. He took himself, and his wife, serenely for granted. Her he admired sincerely, and that he knew her to be absurd, capricious, a little unreasonable, made him the better pleased with her: these qualities were very proper in a woman, and indeed indispensable, for if women weren't fools, he argued, we should have to make them so before they'd look twice at us. He made no attempt to exercise any direct dominion over Drusilla, or to establish any direct relationship with her. He did not "try to make friends" with her, as, with negative or harmful results, a more imaginative man might have done; and so her secretly prepared resistance to such a friendship imperceptibly evaporated, for lack of *raison d'être*, and a tacit friendliness came into existence without her knowing it. On the whole it was pleasant to have Dr Hewish about the place. He was goodnatured and gave no trouble. At breakfast he was silent to the point of moroseness, but one soon got used to that; at lunch he sometimes cracked a little joke or two, much to his own enjoyment; tea-time was a ceremony he abstained from taking part in; at supper he was apt to become expansive and reminiscent, garnishing the conversation with stories of his student days or titbits from the life history of the liver-fluke. But always, as the clock struck half past nine, he would rise from his chair and retire to a room of his own, a bachelor's room, half-panelled in oak, filled with books of a forbidding aspect and engravings of a sombre hue, and furnished in a heavy style, with mahogany bookcases and tallboys and chairs upholstered in saddle-

bags. Young Philip called it the "padded cell," and Dr Hewish gave every sign of enjoying the joke.

Except in the school holidays, when Philip was at home and sometimes entertained his friends, it was a household of women, with the doctor playing the part of an indulged visitor; and an intimate part of the household was Miss Minty, who, soon after the cataclysm, had been engaged to finish off Drusilla's interrupted education. From Miss Minty, who knew nothing of the nature of that interruption, Drusilla learned embroidery, music, some mathematics, a little French, less Latin next to no history and "the use of the globes". In Drusilla's idea Miss Minty was a creature without past or future. Born at the age of thirty-five or so, here she was, prim, gentle, virginal, a modest water-colour. Her face was small, round, freckled; her eyes were of a cornflower blue; and, despite her great age the demureness of her aspect and her evident desire to please gave her at times a somewhat childlike air. But Drusilla did not see her so. If in some sense she was a child to Drusilla, she was also a pedagogue, and capable of making one feel very small and ignorant. Compared with Drusilla's radiant youth she counted her governess-equipment as something less than dross, as dust and ashes, wormwood and gall; yet the fact remained that because she understood the binomial theorem, and without a moment's hesitation could tell you the precise location of Basra or the Macgillcuddy Reeks, she was Drusilla's superior. This fact was implicit in the tone in which Drusilla said: "Where is she going, Miss Minty?"

"How should I know, my dear?" retorted Miss Minty, with a smile.

Both were a little disingenuous, and each was aware that

the other knew it. Drusilla had reason to fear that Mamma was taking her once again to see Cousin Bertha, and Miss Minty, knowing this to be so, was on tenterhooks of anxiety lest the girl should rebel. Drusilla was eighteen, and her years of tutelage were at an end. At any moment, so it seemed to Miss Minty, it might occur to her that she could disobey or defy her elders with impunity. But the habit of obedience had been well learned, and on this occasion the idea of rebellion did not enter Drusilla's head. If Mamma needed her company on these charitable visits to Cousin Bertha, there could be no question of withholding it. She did, however, wish it had been otherwise. It was impossible not to be sorry for Cousin Bertha, who had been ill for months and seemed unlikely to get either better or much worse; and Drusilla, unlike her mother, got no enjoyment out of being sorry for people. For Drusilla Cousin Bertha's sick-bed was the source and centre of a creeping contagion of misery, a fungoid growth that threatened to fill the whole house, the whole world. Life in that bedroom was a mean and desolate affair, something to be endured, a mere punishment; and Drusilla never entered it without feeling a coldness at her heart. Bertha Hunt was no true relation of hers, she was a connexion of Dr Hewish's, and Drusilla thought it very unfair that she, Drusilla, should be required to suffer with her.

Having, for the space of two seconds, gravely considered Miss Minty's reply, she smiled back at her, almost with the air of returning something for which she had no use. Then, with no further remark, she went out of the room in search of her duty. Thoughtfully she ascended the stairs, and as she gained the first landing Mamma came out of the conjugal bedroom dressed in all her visit-paying regalia.



"Ah Drusilla! I want you to come with me to Green Lanes."

"Yes, mamma. Miss Minty told me."

"She *told* you!"

"She told me you wanted me to go out somewhere."

"Yes, to see Cousin Bertha. I'm afraid she's no better, poor thing. I had a letter this morning."

"Yes, you told me, mamma."

Mrs Hewish looked sharply at her daughter. "Don't keep saying people told you, darling. It's not quite nice in a young girl. Run along now and get ready."

Drusilla's reluctance to go to Green Lanes with her mother had another cause than Cousin Bertha's illness, and though she averted her thoughts from that cause she was obliged to exercise a conscious veto on the question that pressed for utterance. To ask Mamma whether Cousin Adrian would be there would tell her too much, and might well prove abortive as well, for it was unlikely that Mamma would have definite information on the point. She said nothing therefore, and when a few minutes later she and her mother stepped into the street together she was acting her part to perfection and taking an artist's pleasure in the performance. She did not wish to visit the pseudo-cousin and its handsome black-bearded husband, but, if she had so wished, it was thus and thus that she would have behaved. And, consequently, it was thus that she did behave: not in a spirit of hypocrisy, not with the primary intention of deceiving her dear mistaken mamma, but because if the business had to be gone through with, this was the easiest way to go through with it. She feigned an intelligent interest in the details of the journey. A long and tiresome journey, for their destination lay the other side of London.

First by slow train to Waterloo, thence to King's Cross in a horse-omnibus, another train, another bus and finally ten minutes' walking through populous suburban streets with no sight of the river to relieve and release her: this was the prospect that Drusilla was zealous to make light of. At home, the river was a perpetual delight and solace. The barges and the dinghies and the occasional exciting yacht, the ebb and flow of the tides, the continuous rhythm of life and change: these things not only pleased her senses and fed her imagination but satisfied an obscure hunger in her: she would sit and stare out of the front windows of the house for an hour at a time, in a vague fathomless contentment. But today the river must be left behind. "Shall we have luncheon at Cousin Bertha's, mamma?" No, they would have to content themselves with sandwiches and coffee at one of the railway stations. Drusilla was startled by this information. Mrs Hewish took her meals with an almost religious seriousness and deprecated any kind of gastronomic irregularity. What then did this visit portend that could so easily seduce her from that allegiance? "I hope it will agree with your digestion, mamma." Mrs Hewish answered firmly that she was quite sure it would.

When they came within sight of the house they were bound for, Drusilla remarked, with an innocence somewhat over-acted: "Cousin Bertha isn't a *real* cousin, is she?"

Mrs Hewish looked impatient and sounded so. "Darling, I've told you often enough surely."

"I'm so sorry, mamma. I've no head for details." Drusilla paused a moment, wondering whether she dared pursue the subject further: then she plunged on, stubbornly. "Who is she exactly? Please tell me again."

Mrs Hewish answered in slow precise tones: "She is

Father's cousin's daughter, my dear, and it was Father who assisted her into the world."

"I see," said Drusilla. "But of course he's not actually my father, is he; so I'm not related to her at all, am I?"

"Perfectly true, my dear," said Mrs Hewish with a tolerant smile. "And what then?"

"I mean," said Drusilla, "not even distantly, or by marriage, or anything?"

She knew that she was making herself seem an excessively simple young person, but that she did not mind: she was glad to have re-ventilated that aspect of the situation which gave her a right to feel aggrieved. She had elicited no new fact; she had only underlined the obvious, which Mrs Hewish seemed resolved to ignore. Even now she refused to understand, and Drusilla, getting no further response from her mother, and eager to defeat her obtuseness, added quickly, in a voice edged delicately with discontent: "Of course it's different for *you*!" Still Mrs Hewish refrained from answering, and neither she nor her daughter (though both were a little startled) realized that with that simple remark a new chapter in their relationship had begun: Drusilla, for the first time, had allowed it to appear that she dissociated herself from her mother. Even the uncomfortable business of acquiring and acknowledging a new father had been got through without any such implied declaration of independence.

In silence the two women came to the front gate of a semi-detached red-brick villa which, although it stood in a row with others of precisely the same pattern, instantly, to Drusilla's apprehension, asserted its difference, its major importance, its secret significance. In the middle of the little square front garden, or yard, stood a rhododendron

bush shedding its last petals; and a mountain ash, giving promise of red berries, aspired bravely above the level of the fence. The fence was painted a gravel-brown, and on the painted surface an elaborate effect of "graining" had been superimposed. But not these features, nor their sum, gave the house its uncomfortable distinction for Drusilla, whose eyes saw it as the shell of something, some quality, which she shrank from contemplating. It had, moreover, a history for her, brief, palpable, malodorous. Too late now, even had she dared the question, to ask whether Cousin Adrian would be at home.

He was. He opened the door in person: a man of thirty-five or so, well-built, fresh-complexioned, quietly self-assured. A trimly pointed beard exaggerated his oldness and made him seem slightly foreign (though beards were not yet so exceptional as they were to become in the next decade), and his eyes, gazing from under bushy black eyebrows, were of the kind that Drusilla, who hated them, would have been forced to describe to herself as "romantic". He greeted his visitors in a low voice, conscious of the occasion.

"How good of you, Eleanor! And of you, my dear!"

Mrs Hewish, scarcely touching his proffered hand, scrutinized him eagerly. "How is she, Adrian?"

He shrugged his shoulders, spreading out empty hands in a gesture of helplessness. Drusilla saw wretchedness looking out of his eyes: wretchedness, combined with a sense of his own tragic importance.

"You don't mean—" began Mrs Hewish.

"Yes," he said. They stepped over the threshold and he shut the door with an exaggerated quietness, as though fearful of waking his wife from a hard-won precarious peace.

"She passed away early this morning." Drusilla recoiled as from a blow. The euphemism made her shudder. Cousin Bertha had not "passed away": she was upstairs, lying in her bed, dead and dreadful. Death was as flat as that. And if what was upstairs was not Cousin Bertha, where then was she? Perhaps in this very room, listening, watching; watching the sick sad smile that flashed and faded on her husband's face; listening to the hushed inquiries and sympathetic ejaculations of Mrs Hewish; standing, or floating, at Drusilla's elbow, half a pace behind her. The three who were living had now moved into the small dining-room. Over the middle and main section of the bay window the green venetian blinds were drawn, lest the sunshine should effect an entrance. The room was airless, heavy with the smell of upholstery. Mrs Hewish, busily mopping her eyes, sank into a chair; Drusilla stood stiffly in front of the empty fireplace, wondering if she too would feel better if she could cry; and Cousin Adrian leaned towards them from the other side of the table, on whose mahogany surface he rested the tips of his fingers in an attitude vaguely suggestive of a public speaker.

"It's God's will," said Mrs Hewish.

She placed her hands on the arms of her chair and helped herself to rise, and the three stood irresolute, selfconscious, waiting. Waiting for what? Drusilla couldn't answer the question. Her thoughts became wild. Perhaps if they waited long enough the dead woman would come downstairs and shake hands with them and hope they had had a pleasant journey. Drusilla saw her, framed in the doorway—tousled hair, yellow skin, deep sunken indifferent eyes. She had never in fact seen Cousin Bertha out of bed, and never would.

"Would you like to see her, Eleanor?"

So that was what they had all been waiting for! Drusilla stared accusingly at her mother, but, just in time, she veiled the stare with softness, hoping against hope that her fears might be proved groundless.

"Yes indeed, Adrian!" said Mrs Hewish, dabbing her eyes once more. She turned to look at Drusilla. "My dear . . ."

"I shall stay here, mamma," said Drusilla. It was peremptory, a defiance. Go and stare, cried Drusilla; go and stare your fill. But don't pretend not to love doing it: that's cheating.

"Of course, dear!" answered Mrs Hewish.

And Drusilla, left alone with that polite surprised look to ponder, felt snubbed, a child again. The bubble of her rebellion was pricked. She was not, however, to be left alone very long; for after a very few minutes, long before the blankness of her mind gave place to coherent thought, Cousin Adrian reappeared.

He came forward eagerly, diffidently, trying by his manner, preoccupied with a secret intention, to disavow diffidence and eagerness equally. "Your mother's washing her hands," he said.

Her own or Cousin Bertha's? asked Drusilla. But not aloud.

"She'll be down presently."

And while she's away, said Drusilla without speaking, I am to stay here with you and feel your eyes looking at me, running over me. Or carefully *not* looking at me, keeping their distance, being so very very humble and manly. And I don't know which I hate most.

"I think I should like to go into the garden," said Drusilla

suddenly, taking a step towards the door.

She felt him praying, willing, that she should stay where she was; and the prayer held her back, though if it had been spoken it would have precipitated her flight.

While she stood irresolute, he began speaking in easy level tones, subdued to the melancholy of the occasion. "I am going away, Drusilla. My firm is sending me abroad for a while. For a year at least. Perhaps longer."

"Really, Cousin Adrian!" The idea of his being abroad made her at once feel happier and more friendly. "That will be nice, won't it?"

It was a statement rather than a question, but Adrian set himself to answer it precisely, as though he were sitting for an examination. "Yes and No. It will be helpful to get away for a time, so that one can forget—what one has to forget. And, yes, it will mean promotion, of course, some small measure of prosperity. One doesn't wish to minimize the value of that. For a year, perhaps, I shall be better elsewhere. But after that," said Adrian, raising his eyes from the carpet and looking with sudden resolution at Drusilla, "I shall want England again, and all that England means to one."

"Oh will you?" said Drusilla, with an air of surprise. "I should have thought being abroad was much nicer. Everything must be so different abroad."

It did not occur to her to ask which part of "abroad" he was bound for, and he did not notice the omission.

"So," said Adrian, "so you'd like to live abroad, would you, Drusilla?"

"Oh no," she said hurriedly. "Not for myself. But if I were a man, I mean, I should like to."

He smiled quizzingly, and she with embarrassment; then

both of them, remembering that death was in the house, disentangled their glances and gave themselves to the silence.

"Here's Mother at last," said Drusilla, hearing steps on the stairs.

Mrs Hewish came into the room and the first stage of leavetaking was entered upon. "But you will have a cup of tea," protested Adrian. Mrs Hewish declined the offer and before it could be repeated she began murmuring of sympathy and hopes and being of help. Drusilla, outwardly meek, looked on derisively. There is nothing to say, she asserted with passion, so why don't we say nothing, and just go? Murmuring together her elders led the way to the door. Drusilla, while Mother was shaking hands in farewell, slipped across the threshold and stood aloof, waiting for her.

"Good-bye, Drusilla!"

Would he lean across the step? Lean he did, but it was his hand only that he offered.

"Good-bye, Cousin Adrian!"

No gallantry this time. No claiming of cousinly privilege. Relieved, triumphant, Drusilla yet felt her victory turn to ashes, her triumph consumed in a blush. On her cheek burned the kiss he had given her on the previous visit, and suddenly, meeting his sad glance, she realized that this abstinence, for which she had prayed, was conscious, meaningful, laden with amorous portent.



## SISTER AND BROTHER

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KEWBURY STRAND, where with her mother and her stepfather Drusilla had now lived for four decisive years (a year had passed since the departure from these shores of Cousin Adrian), was a region of character and bleak compelling charm. It consisted of a single street of houses, large and small, fronting the river and divided from it only by the Strand itself, a broad paved walk. The roadway lay at the back, behind the house-gardens, and in this hinterland were to be found a shop or two (one of which was also the post-office), a few cottages, and, further afield, some large houses for the accommodation of the proud. The true Strand-dwellers constituted a community in themselves, a community in which the comparatively prosperous and the comparatively poor lived side by side on terms of a neighbourliness that was tempered but not destroyed by snobbery; and they regarded with tolerant irony the fact that from the point of view of Her Majesty's Postmaster General those others, those foreigners living in the back of beyond, were also of Kewbury Strand. Several villages and suburbs lay between Kewbury Strand and the roaring metropolis of London; yet the distance was traversed twice daily—for these were progressive times—by a horse-omnibus that did the journey there and back in something less than four hours.

Yes, the place had character, and the river, with its tides and its traffic, the birds that frequented it, the dead bodies that were found in it, the aspens and willows that grew at intervals along its banks, was of the essence of that character. When one of the swans beat his great wings on the water, it was like hearing the clack-clock of horses' hooves on a metalled road. If you woke in the dark of a windy night, the giant willow in front of the house would be sighing and rustling like the sea itself; and the hooting siren of a barge would set your drowsy mind stirring with a sense of romance and adventure, and filling with vague vanishing images: night-voyage, creak and slap of rigging, fields of darkness, towns asleep.

Occasionally, when the river was full, its waters at high tide would submerge the intervening pavement and wash gently against the house wall, just under the two bay windows, and against the floodgate permanently fixed across the lower quarter of the front doorway to protect the house from invasion. Two or three times, on autumnal or wintry afternoons, this had happened; and then everybody in the Strand, except a few incorrigibly practical-minded ones, was filled with a feeling of excitement and liberation, a spacious birthday feeling of wonder and release. The house became an ark, an island, a forlorn romantic refuge; and one could not leave it except by boating or wading, and even that, one hoped, might prove to be deliciously dangerous. In sober fact there was nothing to prevent Drusilla and Philip from opening the back-door and walking the length of the garden to the road beyond, but they found no difficulty in forgetting that. Philip, shining with delight, would step out of the bay window of the room still known (because Drusilla had done her lessons with Miss Minty

there) as the schoolroom, and wade across the Strand to where his boat was moored. Then he would bring the boat to the house-door, so that Drusilla might enter it dryshod, and the two would cruise round, enjoying the new face that was upon everything, and collecting driftwood, which on these occasions was so suddenly and excitingly plentiful. Often they secured pieces too large to be carried in the boat, planks and spars whose origin provided each with a moment of private, dreaming conjecture, unshared with the other: these would be towed home in triumph, and in due time they built of them a shanty in the garden where, when they felt sociably inclined, they entertained their friends, but where, more often, they engaged by themselves in games of fantasy. Once there were floods indeed, when the water came into the house and they were all roused from their beds by the policeman; and thereafter there was a touch of the consciously heroic in their love of the river.

Games of pretence were now a thing of the past, though they may be said to have survived in subtle and unrecognized forms. Drusilla at nineteen, and Philip two years younger (though because of his size he was often taken for the elder), had other preoccupations than treasure islands and Indian Mutinies. By the benevolence of their stepfather, that friendly uncommunicative providence, they learned to ride, and spent many equestrian hours in Dearborn Park with the sons and daughters of eligible neighbours. Drusilla's early reticence had proved infectious: she and her brother had never exchanged many confidences of a personal kind, and such exchanges became rarer and rarer as time went on. There was, none the less, a bond between them, an unspoken intimacy, and not seldom they wearied of gregarious pursuits and by tacit consent avoided their

other friends and for a while had no company but each other's. At such times, in all but the worst weather, their favourite resort was the island, lying to the left, which you could see from the left-hand window of the schoolroom bay. It was smaller than the garden, but it was a genuine island, shaded by trees and overgrown with rank vegetation, and therefore magnetic.

"Why didn't we build our hut here?" said Philip. Receiving no answer (Drusilla, lazily enjoying the August afternoon, knew that none was required), he added, ruminating: "Better than the garden."

They sat at ease in the boat, which lay moored in a tiny creek of the island, canopied by an overhanging willow. The place was warm and cool; the time had a rounded perfection. The leaves of the willow made a luminous shade, and through that green roof the sundrops came falling like rain, dappling hands and faces; came falling like rain on the newly painted boat and splintered on the ripples of the water. There were flies, it is true, but who cared? Neither Philip nor Drusilla had any attention for flies, or for anything, it would have seemed, but the lazy day-dreaming pleasure of the moment.

It was now, however, that Philip chose to open the subject of Clarice Milford. "Dru, what would you do if you had a letter from a chap, and you didn't know what to write back?"

Drusilla, who was paddling the fingers of her right hand in the water, slowly shifted her glance to Philip. He was attentively examining his boots, and it gave her an odd sudden satisfaction to recognize that this was precisely what he *would* do.

"What sort of letter?" she asked.

"Well, you know, a silly sort of letter. A sort of love letter." He abandoned his boots and faced her squarely. "What would you do, supposing you quite liked him up to a point, and didn't want to hurt his feelings, and yet . . ."

He didn't finish the sentence, but Drusilla nodded her understanding. "I see what you mean. Have *you* had a letter from someone?"

He glanced away again, but not in embarrassment: a long young man, in colouring rather fair than otherwise (and seeming fair indeed by contrast with his sister's warm darkness), not yet quite sure of what to do with his limbs, but already in quiet and faintly sardonic possession of his intimate self. He was wearing flannels: white trousers, a red and blue striped belt with a serpent for buckle, a coloured tie with its ends carefully clamped to his shirt, and a school blazer. His straw-hat lay in the boat at his feet. In the eyes of a later generation he would have seemed excessively correct in his attire, as though dressed for a school garden-party; but Drusilla took pleasure in the summer freedom of his appearance, and he, for his part, found nothing odd in the sight of Drusilla sitting stiff and corseted, covered in clothes from ankle to chin and from wrist to shoulder, and sincerely enjoying the August afternoon.

"Yes," said Philip, "I have." He half-grinned at her: shyly, but with humour too. The hypothesis he was inviting her to consider was too transparent a parable for either of them to take seriously. "It's from Miss Milford."

"From Miss Milford?" Nothing could have been more nicely calculated than the degree of surprise that Drusilla displayed in her tone, in her leaning a little forward, in the delicate raising of her eyebrows. It was neither too much nor too little. Grave interest, polite surprise, and an affec-

tionate solicitude not offered but ready should the occasion demand it: all this was there. In sober fact she was not in the least surprised: the name was precisely the one she had expected.

"Yes. I've been riding with her a bit these hols, you know."

Drusilla nodded. "I know."

"And . . . well, now she's written me this letter. It's a bit awkward, I must say."

"Is she," said Drusilla, "falling in love with you or something?" The idea of anyone's falling in love with Philip was fantastic enough, but there was no escaping the implication.

The boy blushed. "It's such awful rot, you know. Makes a chap feel such a fool, I mean."

"She's never given any sign before of . . . of liking you specially?"

"No. Nothing like that. She's always been quite ordinary."

"I think," said Drusilla, "she's rather a nice sort of person, don't you?"

Philip conceded that much freely enough. "She's a very decent rider, too," he added.

Drusilla saw clearly that from Miss Milford's point of view the case was hopeless, and in that moment, without being aware of any change, she ceased to be entirely disinterested. Simple curiosity gave place to a complication of feelings. Identifying herself with Philip, because he was her brother and because he was here in the flesh confiding a secret to her, she shared for a moment his perplexed discomfort. And identifying herself also with Miss Milford, because Miss Milford was a woman, she experienced a

twinge of humiliation and of self-defensive self-deceiving anger. Anger against Philip or Miss Milford? Against both, against neither. She was a boy importuned; she was a woman disdained. And not till now did she remember to be shocked by Miss Milford's breach of a sacred convention, defiance of the natural order. Wretched young woman, so to have exposed her heart, and cheapened her sex! Drusilla, betrayed in that betrayal, was ready to despise her, though still more ready to be sorry for her plight.

"What do you think I ought to do, Dru?" asked Philip, after a silence.

"It's difficult to say," said Drusilla. "You see," she uncomfortably ventured, consciously treading on delicate ground, "I don't know what she says, so I can't really judge."

Philip made no pretence of not understanding. He had yet to learn, or perhaps would never learn, the art of evading facts; and his candour was unashamed. "I know." He thrust a hand into his pocket and drew forth an envelope. "It seems beastly unfair to show anybody. But after all it's only you, and that's different, isn't it?"

Their glances met, and for a moment they were conscious of the affection that bound them together, though to confess as much, by the least word or sign, was out of the question, a possibility that could never occur to either.

In a voice desperately neutral Drusilla remarked: "That's for you to decide, Phil. Naturally I should—"

He cut in quickly, eager to assure her, unable to bear that she should think it necessary to promise him secrecy. "Of course! I don't need telling that." He spoke irritably, ashamed of his emotion. "Anyhow I think I've got to let

you see it, if you don't mind. Because, dash it, I don't know what to say in answer."

He drew the letter from its envelope and spread it open on his knee. Holding it fastidiously between finger and thumb, as though he felt it to be in some sense alive and sharing the vulnerability of its author, he ran his eye hastily over its contents. Darling Phil, Thank you again and again for the perfectly wonderful ride we had on Wensday. Well how are you Phil, none the worse I hope for the "exertions of the day"!!! Bess is a bit of a tartar and I think it is perfectly wonderful the way you mastered her, you very quickly showed her "who was who"! But I know you like a horse to have a bit of spirit, you told me so and I am entirely of your way of thinking! It is very nice I think that we have so many tastes in common, we both like the same things I mean. Well I must not inflict a long letter on you Phil but I hope you will find time to write me a line or two in reply. I woke very early this morning and the first thing I thought of was you, I think about you a terrible lot dear. The sun came tapping at my window with his golden fingers and the birds outside were calling your name. I have never met anyone like you before, you are so modest and strong like a knight of old time. If you do not like me *at all* in return, I could never see you again and I think that would kill me, but if you do like me a quarter as much as I like you I shall be the happiest person in the world! Please write soon and put me out of my misery one way or the other, but I cannot stop loving you not even if it makes you angry Phil. It is just the way things are and you are my ideal. Well perhaps I shall be hearing from you dear, I shall look for the postman every day. So now I must bring this letter



to a close With kind regards From your ever loving Clarice.

Philip stared at the letter for a moment, wrinkling his forehead. Then with a sudden jerk of his hand he thrust it across the boat to Drusilla. "You see?"

When Drusilla had read the letter through she felt ashamed, and for a moment could find nothing to say.

Philip, perceiving her embarrassment, retrieved the letter from her lap and put it back in his pocket. "Funny sort of letter," he remarked, in a carefully matter-of-fact tone. "For a grown-up person to write, I mean." It was common knowledge that Clarice Milford had celebrated her twenty-first birthday six or seven months ago.

"Very funny," said Drusilla. The blush was beginning to ebb from her cheeks. "Of course you'll have to answer it, Phil."

"Yes," agreed Philip dubiously.

"It would be dreadfully unkind not to."

"Yes," said Philip again. He began another search in his pockets and presently produced another letter. "I did start to write. But it doesn't seem right somehow. Look, I thought of saying: Dear Miss Milford . . ."

"Oh no!" cried Drusilla, laughing in spite of herself. "You can't call her Miss Milford after that!"

"It's her name," said Philip, stubbornly. "Anyhow what else can I call her?"

With a certain impatience Drusilla answered: "You must call her Clarice. You simply must."

"But it seems such a cheek," protested Philip, wilfully obtuse. "After all she's nearly twenty-two and I'm only seventeen."

"Poor girl!" said Drusilla softly. "It's bad luck on her, you know. No one would take you for seventeen."

"Anyhow . . ." began Philip.

"Anyhow," said Drusilla firmly, "unless you want to be horribly unkind you must call her Clarice, so we needn't argue about that. But go on. What else have you said?"

Philip began reading out his letter again. "Dear Miss Milford, Thank you very much for your letter. I am glad you enjoyed the ride, and hope we can go out again some time or other. Bess is one of the best mounts I have ever been on. Please excuse brevity of this, as I have got to go out. With kind regards, yours sincerely, Philip Moore. . . . Well, Dru? Is that all right, d' you think?"

Drusilla looked rueful. "She deserves it, I expect. Naturally she'll be disappointed."

"I can't help that, can I?" said Philip crossly. "I can't rise to all this *darling* business. It's the most awful rot."

"Well," retorted Drusilla, "you did *ask* my advice, didn't you?"

The look of discontent on Philip's face gave place suddenly to a friendly, impudent, disarming smile. "All right, *darling*! You tell me what to say."

Having acknowledged his "darling" with a suitable grimace she answered judicially: "No one wants you to say what you don't feel." I wonder if that's really true? she asked herself. "But," she went on, "you needn't be too much of an iceberg, need you?"

"Very true, Granny," said Philip.

Knowing his levity to be selfconscious, self-protective, Drusilla did not trouble to alter her tone. "If you say Dear Clarice instead of Dear Miss Milford, and if you say you hope to ride again with her *soon*, instead of . . . what was it?"

"Some time or other," supplied Philip.

Drusilla smiled. "I thought so. You do see the difference, don't you?"

He saw the difference. He charmingly agreed to do all that she suggested, and then at once began talking of other things. If he wished to forget the problem of Clarice Milford, he apparently had no difficulty in doing so.

With Drusilla it was otherwise. Clarice Milford was nothing to her, and Philip was in no danger of being foolish. But because she knew everything, because she knew nothing, the subject was disagreeable to her, and because it was disagreeable she couldn't help glancing at it from time to time, even after Philip had gone back to school for the Michaelmas term. In the absence of her charmer, the unfortunate Clarice made a diffident attempt to cultivate Drusilla's friendship; but Drusilla, though she wanted to be kind, and succeeded in giving a quite passable imitation of friendliness, was conscious of an inward shrinking from the secret which Clarice was perhaps longing to confide to her. They had two or three rides together, and there was much talk and laughter between them; but the talk was unintimate and the laughter an evasion; at sight or suspicion of Clarice's amorous awakening, her mind closed up, resolutely virginal.

## THE LETTER

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SOON after Philip's return for the Christmas holidays, Drusilla, coming down to breakfast one morning, noticed a foreign-looking letter lying on the table beside her mother's plate. The mists and rain of November were over, and December was beginning with a wintry brightness which she found delicious. The dining-room where the family breakfasted, like the schoolroom that was no longer a schoolroom, looked on the river, and to the river, inevitably, Drusilla's eyes were drawn. Her pleasure in that familiar view was no longer conscious, except at moments, but whatever it had lost in acuteness it had gained in depth, like a matured love. All the family were present except Mamma herself. Miss Minty, with her usual air of self-effacement, presided at the coffee-pot; Philip was vigorously consuming eggs and bacon; Dr Hewish, having finished his breakfast, had pushed back his chair and was occupied with his morning paper. And now the latecomer, Mrs Hewish, entered the room saying "Good morning, my dears! How disgracefully lazy of me!" This piece of self-admonition was delivered with a smile at once sweet and comfortable. Mrs Hewish was growing old gracefully, and she had the gift of making indolence seem an additional charm. Both her husband and her daughter glanced up at her with admiration

in their eyes. Miss Minty and Philip returned the greeting in a more preoccupied fashion. For Drusilla, Mrs Hewish was a mother to be loved, a power to be resisted, a woman exasperating and adorable, obstinate and generous, wrong-headed and wise. Coexistent with her nagging desire to escape from Mother, from her demand for love and obedience, from her blindness and her too-much-knowledge, from her understanding and her failure to understand, was a longing to be, at times, exactly like her. In illuminated moments such as this, Drusilla admired, to the point of envy, her mother's tranquil and unassertive self-assurance, her almost feline grace of movement, her unfussiness, all in strong contrast to the over-conscientious demeanour of Miss Minty; and she would have been prodigiously astonished to learn that Miss Minty, equally conscious of her own deficiencies, was at this very moment admiring in Drusilla precisely the qualities that Drusilla was admiring in her mother, and saying to herself: How like her mother she is, the dear girl!

"Coffee, Mrs Hewish?"

"Thank you, Miss Minty." She received the cup from Miss Minty's respectful hand. "A letter from Cousin Adrian. William!"

Dr Hewish lowered his newspaper and glanced inquiringly over the rims of his spectacles. "Yes, my dear."

"There's a letter from Adrian."

"Adrian?" The doctor's vagueness was not flattering to the memory of Cousin Bertha's relict.

"Yes. Adrian Hunt." Her eyes scanned the letter. "He's coming back to England. Isn't that splendid!" remarked Mrs Hewish languidly. Her connexion with Adrian was even more remote than her husband's, but her over-devel-

oped sense of family made her feel a responsibility towards him. In taking possession of William Hewish she had assumed all those family obligations which he himself, being a man, and a professional man to boot, was scarcely aware of, and, whether aware or not, had no intention of bothering about. "Perhaps we can persuade him to spend Christmas with us. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Drusilla? Quite a little party!"

Her glance rested meltingly on her daughter, extorting from her, by a process of loving blackmail, a brief painful smile. She makes me smile, she makes me a liar. It's not enough that she's spoiling my Christmas: I've got to pretend I like having Christmas spoiled. And she knows, she knows. She knows I am lying when I smile. She wants me to lie. Because she's Mother and I love her she won't leave me alone she won't let me live. Because she's Mother and I hate her.

Dr Hewish was back in his paper, but now, rather abruptly, he jumped up, consulted his large gold watch, and exclaimed that he must be off to the surgery. Philip, aware of her sister's agitation in spite of her façade of placidity, wondered what it was all about. As for Miss Minty, who had never quite decided whether she was to regard herself as one of the family or not, she observed less than Philip, and misinterpreted what she observed. Mrs Hewish's "Quite a little party" had a secret significance for her; for it was her hope that Mrs Hewish would agree to her staying at Christmas instead of going to spend the holiday with her sole surviving relative Aunt Phoebe. Miss Minty's position in the Hewish household had for some time been a precarious one, as she herself could not help knowing. The schooling of Drusilla being now at an end,

there was small reason in logic why Miss Minty's services should be retained. She did indeed make herself useful. As a chaperon she was all that could be wished. Without her it would have been scarcely possible to allow Drusilla to have the singing lessons she had set her heart on; for Madame Rubin lived and taught in London, and it was not possible that a young girl should travel to and from London without suitable escort. But though it was more convenient to have Miss Minty than to be without her, she could no longer be regarded as a necessary expense. On the other hand she was now an orphan, alone in the world, and, still more important, the house would not have seemed the same without her. So when she shyly and reluctantly offered to "seek another post", Mrs Hewish had set the question aside, saying "Don't let's be in a hurry about that, my dear"—a remark that lent colour to Miss Minty's hope of being allowed to forego her Christmas holiday.

The news she had heard this morning fortified her wish to stay where she was. For Miss Minty could see some little distance beyond her small charming turned-up nose, and she was confident that the immediate future would be eventful for her beloved Drusilla.

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## THE KISS

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TO HAVE Cousin Adrian loping by one's side along the towpath to Richmond was like taking a large unhappy dog for a walk. Except, thought Drusilla, that I'm rather fond of dogs. The morning was cold, the weather doubtful, but the rain which she had looked to to prevent this outing was still stored in the sky. When the wind rose, blowing in from the river, raindrops in plenty fell from the overhanging trees, but this, so far from driving them home, seemed only to encourage Cousin Adrian to threaten her with the protection of his umbrella. Drusilla, clad in a mackintosh, evaded this attention: by repeated refusal to let him so much as unroll the umbrella she made clear her resolve on this point. Cousin Adrian moved gracefully beside her, and when he thought he could do so without being detected he stole a glance at her face. His walk was sinuous and springy: there was a suggestion of crouching animal in his posture. Drusilla, acutely conscious of his presence and his wordless claim upon her, was divided between fear of hurting him and a desire to do so. In his every glance, every movement, in the widening of his eyes and the droop of his shoulders, he expressed his invincible respect and devotion.



"It was nice of you to come out this morning," he said, breaking a long silence.

"But I quite enjoy walking," returned Drusilla, fending off his gratitude.

"Do you?" he said. His tone was almost hushed, invested with a religious solemnity. "It is good to hear you say that, Drusilla."

"Besides," said Drusilla, hurrying past his remark, "Mother asked me to, didn't she?" Out of the tail of her eye (for she would not look at him) she saw, or imagined she saw, his rueful look. But she did not want to believe in his unhappiness. To have done so would have obliged her to pity him, and an instinct told her that to pity him would be fatal. She believed, therefore, that his unhappiness was false, an affectation, a device for her undoing. She believed that he loved himself dearly and that he wanted her to join him in that pursuit. And she believed, though at moments it was no more than a hope, that by studiously ignoring his hints she could prevent his saying anything to the point.

During the next three weeks—for Cousin Adrian, invited for Christmas, was encouraged by Mrs Hewish to stay on and on, into the new year—they had several scraps of conversation such as this. The promenade à deux, however, became easier to avoid once the Christmas holiday was over. Cousin Adrian, going to his city office every day, had less time on his hands. He was now something quite splendid in his firm, so Mrs Hewish declared; he had returned from Spain clothed in glamour and glory, having achieved there notable commercial triumphs and established valuable connexions; but the increased responsibilities with which his foreign service was rewarded did not leave him much lei-

sure for making cow's eyes at his so-called cousin. She, for her part, liked him the better for that disability. It both mystified and irritated her that he seemed disposed, with the tacit or spoken consent of his hostess, to make Kewbury Strand his permanent address; but now that his attentions to herself were less marked and less frequent—the result, she was tempted to believe, of her own tactics—Drusilla found him a hundred times more likable. In general company he could be both easy and entertaining, the ostentatious diffidence and respectfulness that at first had marked and marred him giving place to a more natural and comfortable demeanour. His manners, on closer acquaintance, proved to be gentle as well as gentlemanly; and it began to appear that behind that air of courteous unction, which had repelled Drusilla at earlier encounters, was genuine goodwill, as well as a desire to be liked that had its pathetic as well as its annoying aspects. His way with the ladies still erred in the direction of ceremonious chivalry; but when he forgot himself, and forgot to see himself as a humble cavalier, he could be expansive to the point of gaiety. More than once, to her ultimate surprise, Drusilla found herself listening with absorbed attention to his traveller's tales; and she could not help admiring the unobtrusive skill with which, during and after dinner, he would lead Dr Hewish into the conversation, draw him out, and, by a well-placed word here and there, prevent his premature retreat to his "padded cell".

For the reminiscences of a general practitioner Cousin Adrian, it seemed, had an inexhaustible appetite. Dr Hewish found him to be an excellent listener, and liked him. So, most decidedly, did young Philip. At first inclined to deplore the presence of the guest, not unreasonably sup-

posing that the duty of helping to entertain him would be a nuisance and a bore, Philip had been quickly won over by tactics very different from those with which Cousin Adrian had alienated Drusilla. By not seeking Philip's friendship he had won it. Miraculously, as it seemed to Drusilla, he had been able to approach the boy without selfconsciousness, taking him for granted, treating him as an equal and a contemporary, and steering equally clear both of effusiveness and condescension. Philip himself was sharp-eyed enough to detect in Adrian an eagerness to prove himself a young man in spite of his years, in spite of his greying temples. But that eagerness did not betray him into the (even then) fashionable folly of pretending to be Nothing but a Great Big Boy; and Philip, in his own mind, was generously prompt to concede that Adrian was anything but the softy he had first (from his attitude to Drusilla) judged him to be.

As the days went by, and week followed week, it was inevitable that Drusilla herself, her first fears allayed, should begin to be unsure of her judgement. On the now rare occasions when she found herself alone with Adrian he bore himself with a new dignity. That chastened air, as of a beaten and adoring dog, had given place to what seemed like a sober acceptance of the situation as it was. His eyes were too large, his nose too mournful, his lips were too full, and he wore a neat black beard. All this was against him. But his new composure was much in his favour, and it was by no means impossible to feel friendly towards one who asked so little, who asked indeed nothing, and was ready, in the coin of friendship, to give so much. The impossibility was all the other way. And though in logic it should have dismayed her to know that his devotion and his desire were

undiminished, in fact it did no such thing. By a nuance in manner rather than by any word said (for he had learnt his lesson), he made it apparent that whether she liked it or not he was still hers to command; and at the same time he seemed, by the studied ordinariness of his behaviour, to be saying that she need not take cognizance of the fact unless and until it acquired some interest for her. This situation between them, though it had its inconveniences and was attended by its own compunctions, was not entirely distasteful to Drusilla. Certainly she did not want Cousin Adrian, but that he should want her was no longer disagreeable to her. That he or any man should suffer was lamentable, and she duly lamented it; but that she herself had become the occasion for suffering was an exciting and caressing thought. Recognizing her pleasure in it, she averted her eyes hastily, with a pang of self-dislike. But a pleasure so deeply rooted does not wither at a mere rebuke from its host, and the sense of power was intoxicating, a small feast of triumph, after so long a diet of being mothered and managed. Sometimes, glancing covertly at her adorer, she would toy with temptation. I've only to say a word, and there'd be an end of that horrid little beard! Or was she flattering herself? Sorely tempted to put her power to the test, she was restrained rather by fear of what such an interference would seem to imply, and what it might morally commit her to, than by any consideration for Adrian.

She had, nevertheless, conceived a belated and reluctant respect for the man. He was kind; he was unboastful; he was capable of imaginative sympathy and a surprising degree of self-effacement. She owned to herself that she had misjudged him in the panic of her first recoil from his advances; but she was not yet prepared to regret the firm

stand she had made against Mother in the matter of the Christmas presents.

"What shall you give Cousin Adrian, darling?"

"Cousin Adrian!" The indignation in Drusilla's voice and eyes passed for astonishment.

"Yes, dear. Cousin Adrian. You surely haven't forgotten that he's to spend Christmas with us?"

An ironical remark. No one had had a chance to forget the tiresome fact, so brightly and frequently had it been advertised by Mrs Hewish.

"Of course not, mamma."

"Well, we must think of a present for him, mustn't we?"

Drusilla broke into hurried speech, lest her resolution should falter. "But it's not a bit necessary for *me* to give him a present. Besides . . ." In spite of herself she came to a halt on that word.

"Besides what, dear?"

"It wouldn't be proper," said Drusilla firmly.

"*Really*, Drusilla! Surely Mother knows best what is proper and what is not proper in a young girl! Look at me, child!"

Drusilla looked, but refused to flinch. A superior smile sat curled in the corners of her mother's mouth.

"I'm not a child," said Drusilla. Exercising an iron self-control she spoke gently, and with a smile. "That's where you make a mistake, mamma." With desperate courage she rushed on: "I'm not a child, and I'm not going to give Cousin Adrian a Christmas present."

Mrs Hewish tightened her lips, shrugged her shoulders. "Of course, if you wish to be stubborn . . ." For a while she maintained an angry silence. Then, returning to the attack, she said distantly: "You realize, my dear, that he

will certainly bring you a present?"

Drusilla answered quickly: "I hope he won't do any such thing. If he does—"

"Of course he will!" said Mrs Hewish, cutting in. "Coming to us as a Christmas guest he can't help himself. Besides, he's extremely good-natured, Cousin Adrian is. And his manners, I must say, are perfect. I wish I could say the same for yours, my dear."

"I wish you could, mamma," said Drusilla, dangerously meek.

Mrs Hewish, whatever her private thoughts, met meekness with meekness. The breeze died down as suddenly as it had arisen, and in that broad bland face, where anger never found itself at home, the sun shone once more: not burningly, but with a mild autumnal radiance. Nothing could for long obscure that benign maternity. To Drusilla it offered a sentimental landscape, a vista of memories that were her very self; and what of the past was lost to conscious memory lived in the vibration of the love which, for all her occasional trying, she could not withhold. It was sweetly characteristic of Mother that she could accept defeat gracefully and without malice; and it was by virtue of this same sweetness, which evoked a spontaneous adoration in Drusilla, that in the end her defeats were turned imperceptibly into victories. Rebellion, which thrives on opposition, is apt to lose heart in the face of a yielding enemy; and there, precisely, was the danger, as in a flash of insight Drusilla suddenly perceived. She turned her eyes inward and watched the process of her own wavering, the birth of an impulse to yield not to coercion but to kindness, on the plea that it wasn't worth while hurting dear Mamma. She watched and derided herself, recognizing that this famous

and lovely kindness, whether Mamma knew it or not, was in fact a subtle instrument of the coercion it appeared to repudiate. So that's how she does it! cried Drusilla. That's how she's always done it! What a blind baby I've been! In her mother's smiling humour she chose to see (but here she was unsubtle and unjust) a complacent anticipation of ultimate victory. She thinks I'll come round, thought Drusilla indignantly. And on the heels of that thought came a phantom doubt, a whisper of self-mistrust: I wonder if I shall!

She had not "come round," in spite of temptation. She had given Cousin Adrian nothing on Christmas morning, she had thanked him with suitable modest smiles for a copy of *The Scottish Chiefs*, the moment had passed without awkwardness, and here she was, serenely in command of a delicate but not actually disagreeable situation. To set against this little triumph was the memory of another and more momentous conversation with Mother.

"When you have children of your own, dear—"

"But I never shall, mamma," declared Drusilla.

"My dear little girl, that is in God's hands. I'm sure I hope—"

Not entirely, thought Drusilla grimly. Not entirely in God's hands. But to her mother she merely said: "I shall never marry, mamma."

Mrs Hewish, wilfully obtuse, enveloped the girl in a bland indulgent smile. "I thought the same at your age, my dear. And six months later, if you please, I said Yes to your poor father." She capped the story with a happy laugh, which mingled affection and irony.

Drusilla, however, would not connive at her mother's blindness. She stuck obstinately to her point, and sharp-

ened it. "It's different with me."

"Such nonsense, darling!" Irritation crept into her mother's voice.

"It's different with me," insisted Drusilla, staring at distance.

"Why, pray? What do you mean, child?" She was nettled to find herself betrayed into asking the question she was resolved not to ask. So lovely and so wilful, she thought, gazing with affection, with humility, with angry protective love, at the girl's eloquent profile.

"I'm not the same as other girls, mamma. What's the use of pretending I am?" Drusilla turned accusing eyes on her mother. "No one would wish to marry me. How could they?"

Mrs Hewish made a last effort to avoid this treacherous ground. "I think I know someone who does wish to marry you, darling," she said gently, with a false assumption of archness. But anxiety gave the lie to her smile.

Drusilla, unlike her mother, was not to be forced into asking questions. Displaying neither surprise nor curiosity, and in fact feeling neither, she contented herself with saying, with half-sullen reproach: "It wouldn't be fair."

With an abrupt movement Mrs Hewish put aside her knitting. She stood up, as if to confront a crisis. "Now listen, darling. What you are hinting at isn't true. I won't hear of it."

Drusilla wriggled her body, reverting to childhood. "That doesn't make it not true," she said.

"Please let me speak. What happened years ago, we've washed our hands of it." Pilate washed his hands, thought Drusilla. But she said nothing. "It was no more our fault, your fault, than a street accident," went on Mrs Hewish,



"and it has no more significance than a street accident." She had for so long identified herself with this view of the affair that she was unaware of quoting the very words of her husband. "No, don't interrupt me. We must get this quite clear. What happened, that's nobody's business but ours. To tell anybody else would be both stupid and improper. Yes, improper. If you were my sensible girl you would forget it altogether. I," ended Mrs Hewish, with impressive decision, "have already forgotten it."

Drusilla flashed a look at her mother, and looked away again. "Oh, it's easy for you to talk, mammal!" But the shame, the shame of being different, the secret that one couldn't couldn't forget in spite of the story one told oneself that it had happened to someone else—was Mother so blind as not to see that? How complacent she was! How she liked managing, putting everything neatly into its place, and ignoring whatever facts she couldn't fit comfortably into her little universe! But a twinge of doubt attended this facile verdict. What she saw in her mother's eyes made her own glance falter. Contrition flooded her cheeks; a sob shook her; she moved blindly, a child again, into the arms that opened to receive her. And since that moment, or in that moment, so subtly as to escape her notice, a new element had entered into the oscillating current, the Yes and and No, of Drusilla's attitude to Cousin Adrian. In flashes she became aware, for an isolated instant, of an urge within her to self-immolation. To abandon one's will, to give oneself, to suffer—how delicious! And then peace, silence, an end of indecision. Her mind, confronted with this impulse, deftly translated it into terms of cunning and expediency. To please Mother and to escape Mother in one decisive act: the way to that heavenly consummation was clear. To es-

cape Mother and to achieve freedom, with the dignity and status of marriage thrown in as makeweight, was an ambition, she argued, that any young woman might reasonably entertain; and to suffer the company of an amiable and manageable husband was perhaps no great price to pay for such an emancipation.

These thoughts and fancies, in their visits and vanishings, affected only the fringe of Drusilla's consciousness, the centre of attention being occupied by what was called "her music". With the help of the bright-eyed diminutive Madame Rubin she was learning a new discipline and entering a new world, the austere world of art. Madame Rubin, being in her own way a true artist, never mentioned the word in Drusilla's hearing, her talk being always practical and sometimes caustic. Drusilla, normally so self-contained and uneffusive, was apt to overflow in the ecstasy of singing, enjoying the rich deep quality, the sadness and the exultation, of her own voice. But that was not Madame Rubin's notion of what singing should be. When the pupil finished a song with tears in her eyes, she shook her head emphatically and at once prescribed scales and exercises by way of penalty. "We don't want emotion, my dear young lady: we want technique. Let the audience weep if they wish: that is their affair. But yours, it is to sing well, to use rightly the instrument. Take care of the technique, and the emotion will take care of itself." Drusilla listened to the lecture meek-eyed and smiling. Already she had learned the first lesson of art and could look at her work impersonally. "Do not sing like a pig," continued Madame Rubin, giving rein to her indignation. "Do not sing like a cow. The cow-note, yes, that is good: round and full. But you are not a cow. You have lost no calf. And

observe, my dear, you are not a young woman either. No, no, no. You are a musician with an instrument. Why did God give you the lungs, the throat, the noble bosom? To sing with, that is all. Now let us try again."

Technical exercises formed Drusilla's staple diet, anything in the shape of a song—whether Schubert or Bishop or Purcell or Dr Arne—being allowed by her preceptress only as an occasional indulgence or as a reward for good work. At home, however, she did not always choose to remember this rule; and her repertory of songs included certain sentimental pieces of recent manufacture which Madame Rubin would have condemned out of hand. What had once been the schoolroom was now dedicated to music. Here she practised every morning, and again in the evening if no other duty claimed her; and the armistice between herself and Cousin Adrian led to his being admitted to a sanctuary into which even Mother and Philip and Dr Hewish ventured only on those rare occasions when it had been decided, by the general voice, to "have some music". Adrian came, and came alone. She resented him at first. But he kept so quiet, and his appreciation was so apparently impersonal, that she soon learned to take his presence for granted. And when by what seemed the merest chance he was betrayed into revealing himself as a moderately good pianist with a rather special talent for accompanying, she was both pleased by the fact and touched by his modesty in keeping it dark for so long. To have a real accompanist on the stool, instead of occupying it herself, was a pleasure she too rarely enjoyed. Released from the distraction of the keyboard she could now give body and soul to the business of singing, and it may be that sometimes, without her knowing it, more soul could be heard in her

voice than Madame Rubin would have approved of. The effect on a lover may well have been devastating, but with heroic self-command Cousin Adrian pursued his policy of caution until, having entrenched himself in her favour and by his studied neutrality charmed away her fears, he felt the moment had come to launch a new attack.

"Who will be playing for you this time next week, I wonder?"

Drusilla was startled. "Do you mean—"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. I've found myself a little flat in Kensington."

"Really?" said Drusilla. "I . . . I didn't know."

He smiled, rather painfully. The sense of her body's loveliness flooded his mind, and the notion of not possessing it, which suddenly presented itself to him, was insupportable, pricking him to self-pity.

"It would have been a melancholy business, coming back to England," he said, hesitatingly, "if it hadn't been for your kindness."

She faced him steadily, unsmiling. "You mean Mother's, don't you?"

He accepted the correction, but modified it. "Yes of course. I mean all of you. Your dear mother has been goodness itself. I've been overwhelmed with blessings."

Drusilla would have been more than content to leave it at that. But she perceived by his manner that he was resolved to be pathetic, as a preliminary to declaring himself her suitor. If only, she thought, he didn't feel it necessary to look doleful! And, liking him a little, if not much, she reflected that it would be almost worth while marrying him for the sake of getting that look off his face, as well as that beard off his chin. Unready to face the question

he was leading up to, she anticipated it by saying hurriedly: "Why don't you marry Miss Minty?"

He stared in astonishment, with mouth half open. "Miss Minty!"

"Yes. Miss Minty. She adores you," said Drusilla, recklessly inventing.

"What nonsense!" he said. But his astonishment had given place to thoughtfulness. He glanced for a moment at this new idea of Sophia Minty.

Too late, Drusilla saw that she had offered him a short cut to his avowal: her question had confessed that she knew him to be on the point of proposing marriage. He seized his advantage promptly; left his seat at the pianoforte and possessed himself of her hand.

"Drusilla . . ."

So at last it was released, the speech he had been so long preparing. It was a speech combining ardour and respectfulness in equal parts, and its very correctness, its ridiculous conformity to pattern, was somehow disarming. Drusilla felt no doubt of his sincerity and no inclination to laugh at his manners. And she could not forget that by saying Yes she would give happiness not only to Adrian himself but to Mother, to Philip perhaps, to Dr Hewish, and to Miss Minty. Incidentally she would enormously increase her own importance.

". . . and my only wish will be to make you happy," finished Cousin Adrian.

"But I'm happy as I am," said Drusilla.

Adrian smiled, growing confident of victory; and Drusilla, in spite of her agitation, smiled too. He was suddenly more attractive. She felt she knew him and could trust him.

"Hundreds of men will fall in love with you," said

Adrian, after waiting in vain for her to speak again. "Better men than I. But none of them could need you as I need you, Drusilla—or love you more faithfully. Do you . . . do you like me a little, Drusilla?"

"Yes, of course. You are very kind." After a pause she added, as much to herself as to him: "But liking 's not loving, is it?"

"Perhaps love will come," suggested Adrian humbly. "You are so young, so very young. When may I have my answer, Drusilla?"

His constant use of her name jarred on her a little: it had so plainly the effect of an endearment. "I don't know, Cousin Adrian."

"Tomorrow?" he pleaded.

"Perhaps tomorrow," she said. . . .

The next day he won her and lost her.

In the interval she had filled her mind with everything that marriage would bring except marriage itself. Freedom, independence of Mother, a new and dignified status, a house to command, money to spend, and perhaps sons and daughters. But in her stubbornly selective fancy the children appeared ready-made, walking and talking, immaculately conceived. She thought of everything, except Adrian.

"Drusilla!" He stood before her, waiting for the verdict. "Will you be my wife?"

Her heart thumped painfully. She stared at the ground. "If you wish it, Cousin Adrian, and if . . . my mother consents."

She heard a deep sigh. The next moment she was in his arms, passive and trembling. Time moved with a dreadful slowness. It won't matter if I don't think about it. She offered her cheek. He kissed it ceremoniously. That's over:

there was nothing to be frightened of. But his embrace suddenly tightened; his breath was hot on her face. She shut her eyes and submitted to the inevitable. I am acting in a play, she said, as his mouth found hers. But Adrian was not acting, and her pretence breaking down she jerked her face away from him. Still held, she opened her eyes, and the hunger written in his face seemed to her wolfish, like something she had seen long ago in nightmare.

She screamed, and at once he let her go.

"I hate you," said Drusilla. It was her body that spoke.

Profoundly mortified, he began to stammer apologies. "My darling girl . . ."

"I know, I know!" Her voice was harsh and hoarse. "You want to kiss me, don't you! You want to have me and kiss me. It makes you ten years younger. Ten years younger." She laughed cruelly, remembering on whose lips she had last heard that avowal. "Ten years younger," she repeated hysterically. "And even then you'd be too old!"

He stood rigid, watching her. "You've said enough, Drusilla. I understand perfectly." With almost military precision he turned his back on her and went out of the room.

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## THE ESCAPE

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AT FIVE minutes to three on an afternoon in October, a woman, tall and comely, paused at the corner of

Essex Street to take aesthetic stock of her situation. With her back turned on the scene appointed for her new adventure, she allowed a warm reflective glance to rest for a moment on the Law Courts, on the church of Saint Clement Danes, and on all that was visible of the Strand's length, which she had just traversed. In years little more than half-way between twenty and thirty, she combined in her person the radiant bloom of the one with the quiet self-possession proper to the other. Insulated equally from past and future, at this moment she was tasting perfect contentment; but in the heart of that contentment, and quickening it, lay the seed of a boundless expectation. Her aloneness, her freedom, her sight of London glowing in the mellow sunlight, these induced in her the blissful sense of here-and-now as a possession all her own. Today, everything seemed fresh and new. The century itself was only three years old, and already Drusilla belonged to it, and it to her. Elderly people, bound by a lifetime's habit, hadn't yet got used to the thought that there was now a king on the throne of England, instead of a queen; and the disasters and triumphs of the African war were still fresh in their memories. But Drusilla, looking towards the future, had no regard for such things. Her hands were in her muff, and in the muff, besides a handkerchief and a purse containing two sovereigns and some small change, was a letter from Charles Pomeroy's secretary asking her if she would be so good as to call on Mr Pomeroy at three o'clock precisely. Mrs Hewish's habit of late-rising had enabled Drusilla to secure the letter unseen and unquestioned, and for days past she had been giving an excellent performance of a young woman with nothing to hide and happy in the knowledge that her friend *Mrs Adrian Hunt, formerly Sophia Minty,*



had invited her to luncheon and a matinee. Sophia had her own complicated reasons for being willing to conspire with her ex-pupil. She was obscurely grateful and, less obscurely, resentful. She still, if rather anxiously, loved her dear Drusilla; and she was always glad of a chance to display her married happiness before Drusilla's too-lovely eyes, especially at luncheon or afternoon tea, when Adrian himself could not be of the party.

Keeping Mother in the dark had cost Drusilla a preposterous effort. An uneasy conscience, as well as her bubbling excitement, had threatened to defeat her at any minute; and it had been an unspeakable relief to be able, only three hours ago, to confide the tremendous secret to Sophia.

"But who *is* Mr Pomeroy, darling?"

"Oh Sophia! You can't not know who Charles Pomeroy is! You simply can't!"

"Let me think," pleaded Sophia, knitting her brows. "No, don't tell me. Of course I've heard the name." After a moment's industrious remembering she said: "Isn't he something to do with the theatre?"

Drusilla's excited account of the great Charles Pomeroy was punctuated by suitable remarks from Sophia, but before long her smile of encouragement became rather glassy, and her "Isn't that splendid!" and "Well I never did!" began to lack conviction. Drusilla had never met Mr Pomeroy, but everybody knew what he looked like, he was tremendously famous, and she had often seen him getting into the train at Wandsworth on her singing-lesson days. But whether he had seen her, and how he came to know her name, and what he wanted to talk to her about, as to this she had only conjectures to offer. Perhaps this and perhaps

that, but before speculation was far advanced Mrs Adrian raised a monitory forefinger.

"Did you hear anything, dear? Listen!"

The balloon of her eloquence pricked, Drusilla could only stare helplessly.

"Listen!" repeated Sophia. "I thought I heard Baby."

Both women jumped to their feet. Mr Pomeroy was instantly forgotten. The infant's voice was now clearly audible. In a series of inarticulate and emotionally neutral noises it announced a miracle: that its owner was once more awake. Drusilla, as well as Sophia, was thrown into a transport of delight by this announcement; and within thirty seconds of hearing it they were both bending over the creature's cradle.

"Little rascal!" said Sophia.

During the next five minutes she repeated this remark seventeen times, but no sense of the ludicrous awoke to disturb Drusilla's rapture and envy. Seeing tears on her young friend's lashes, Sophia felt triumphant, placated. Adrian was avenged; youth and beauty had been brought low. She's fifteen years younger than I. But I have Baby, and he's younger still. By bearing his child she felt she had consolidated her conquest of Adrian, felt that the youngness which she lacked, and which he desired, would be made up to him in the person of this miraculous child.

"He's just like his daddy, isn't he?" cried Sophia fondly, appealing to Drusilla. "Just like his daddy, the precious!"

"Yes, isn't he!" agreed Drusilla. By this unwitting reminder the spell of her self-pity was broken. "Except for the beard."

The remark was innocent of malice. But Sophia blushed,

forced a smile, and said: "How absurd you are, Drusilla!" There was a hint of vexation in her tone. Her moment of self-assurance was past.

Nothing more was said about Mr Pomeroy until the moment came for taking an affectionate leave of Sophia, who, without quite knowing what she meant, wished Drusilla a successful interview: the interview for which, pausing at the corner of Essex Street, Drusilla now composed herself. Three o'clock precisely, said the letter. It was now five to three. Mr Pomeroy asked for precision and he should have it. She would not be early: that would look eager. She would not be late: that would look girlish. Conscious that passers-by glanced at her with a not unflattering curiosity, she moved her head suddenly, as if resolving a doubt, and began walking at a lively pace along Fleet Street. She knew that the world took pleasure in looking at her, and she had learned to accept the fact without selfconsciousness. But she had learned also that a young woman in London, however idle, must always appear to be purposeful and preoccupied, busy in pursuit of her lawful occasions.

Having walked a few hundred yards east, she turned abruptly and came back, to present herself, on the stroke of three, at Charles Pomeroy's office.

Charles Pomeroy was plump, but not too plump; short, but not too short; perched nimbly and surprisingly on small well-shod feet. His eyes were a cold blue, his nose inquisitive, his mouth ironical. His voice was high-pitched, powerful, resonant. He twinkled with vitality. He was an actor as well as a versatile producer, and his entry, with its ample elegant gestures, was strikingly in character.

"My dear Miss Moore! I've kept you waiting. Forgive me. Let us be seated. Let us both be seated."

Drusilla perceived that the great man was a little drunk. This, in view of her admirable upbringing, should have been a great shock to her. She should have feared for her virtue. She should have regarded Mr Pomeroy as a man not to be taken seriously. But she did nothing of the kind. Mr Pomeroy was superbly in command of himself and of the situation, and there emanated from him some quality, some mysterious energy, which charged the whole interview with an excitement such as Drusilla had never before experienced. She herself became intoxicated, and at the same time miraculously clear-sighted. But she was clear-sighted only along a single track. She saw Mr Pomeroy, not as a fellow-mortal subject to all the hazards and misadventures of mankind, but as an object in space, from which, from time to time, certain articulate noises emerged. Mr Pomeroy, in her vision, was a fairy. His physique was entrancing for no better reason than that it was delicately comical. He was at once prim and lively. She felt that he was solid and shrewd, yet not quite of this world. She had no personal feeling towards him, yet in some sense she loved him at sight. He was quick, like a bird. He was solid, he was worldly, like the successful theatrical producer that he in fact was. He was too good to be true. But true he was, and he was speaking to her.

"Yes," he said, cocking his head on one side, "you're just the young woman I want."

The ambiguity of the remark did not in the least dismay her, though the possibility that outrageous proposals were about to be made to her was present to her mind. If made they were, she was prepared to repel them vigorously. But the possibility caused her neither indignation nor alarm.

"Really?" she said.

"Yes," said Mr Pomeroy, "I think you'll do very well. You'll do for the gipsy scene. Don't misunderstand me: you're nothing like a gipsy. Nothing whatever. But that, if I may say so, is greatly to your credit, Miss Moore. You will do very well."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Drusilla.

"It is not necessary for you to understand, darling," said Mr Pomeroy. "It is only necessary for you to speak your lines intelligently. You have the face and the figure. Not a gipsy face, not a gipsy figure. Nothing of the kind. I think I may say I have seldom seen a young lady less like a gipsy than yourself. But you're just what I want for the Gipsy Queen. You're tall. You've got some flesh on your bones. They will like you very much. And I don't blame them. Can you sing?"

"I can sing," said Drusilla. "I'm going to be a singer."

"Excellent," said Mr Pomeroy. "There'll be a bit of singing for you, but only in the chorus, of course."

Drusilla was enjoying herself. She could have listened to Mr Pomeroy for hours, or so in her first enthusiasm she thought. But curiosity prompted a question.

"Do you mind telling me what you're talking about?"

Mr Pomeroy looked surprised. He raised his eyebrows. "Don't you read the papers, girl? Don't you know I'm putting on a new show? There's a part in it for you. As soon as I saw you in the train I said to myself: That's the girl I want. You'll be on the stage for three minutes. I mean your speaking part will occupy three minutes. Singing and dancing, you'll be on and off a good deal. An aggregate perhaps of, well, say, seventy-five minutes. But the speaking part, three minutes."

"How did you know my name?" said Drusilla. "And my address?"

Mr Pomeroy smiled, jumped to his feet, waved his hands. "That's neither here nor there. One finds out these things. The first time I set eyes on you I could see you were just what I wanted. You can't act? No, no. Of course you can't. But you can do as I tell you. Now what do you say to three pounds a week?"

Drusilla made a rapid calculation. She remembered that she was a young woman who intended to be a singer. She perceived that a great deal depended on her remembering that. "I'm having my voice trained," she remarked. "I've had lessons for years. And next year Mother has promised to send me to the Royal College. I may even," she ended ingenuously, "go to Vienna."

"Yes, yes, yes, yes," said Mr Pomeroy impatiently. "I'm sure you have a very pretty little voice. As a member of my chorus you'll do very adequately. Very adequately indeed. But you don't seem to understand, my dear Miss Moore. May I call you Drusilla?"

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders. "As you please."

"You don't seem to understand, Drusilla, that I'm offering you a part in my new show."

"Seventy-five minutes on the stage," said Drusilla, "and three minutes speaking, I think you said?" She was elaborately indifferent to the proposal. Elaborate indifference was the part she had conceived for herself.

"Yes," said Mr Pomeroy. For the first time in this interview there was a hint of admiration, even of anxiety, in his steady gaze.

"Is that all?" asked Drusilla. She was amazed at her own audacity.

"A good question," said Mr Pomeroy. "And the answer is Yes. That is precisely all. You, I have no doubt, are a very romantic young lady. You have been brought up in the belief (and I do not blame you for it) that no young inexperienced girl, such as you are, can hope to secure a part on the stage without first being seduced by the producer. Now let me assure you that I am a very busy man. I have no time for such nonsense. Seventy-five minutes on the stage, and no extras. That's settled."

"But," said Drusilla, "I want to be a singer."

"Sing!" Mr Pomeroy beamed on her. "Bless my soul, you can sing to your heart's content."

"In the chorus," said Drusilla dubiously. "I don't call that singing. Anyhow, I don't think three pounds is enough. I'm sure my mother would hate me to go on the stage."

Mr Pomeroy looked amazed. His amazement was probably genuine. Making allowance for the fact that he was an actor, Drusilla nevertheless decided that his amazement was genuine. "Now listen to me," he said. "You are a very beautiful young lady. And you wish to go on the stage."

"But I *don't*," said Drusilla. "I want to be a singer. I've been planning for five years to be a singer."

Mr Pomeroy was incredulous. "You don't want to go on the stage?"

"The idea has never occurred to me," Drusilla assured him. "And I'm afraid my mother would never consent to it."

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-six."

"Just right," said Mr Pomeroy. "It's the chance of a lifetime for you. Most girls would jump at it. A speaking part, mind you—"

"Three minutes," interjected Drusilla.

"But a speaking part nevertheless," insisted Mr Pomeroy. "Three pounds a week all for yourself, and you'll be your own mistress. Not mine," added Mr Pomeroy generously.

Drusilla pondered the question for a moment or two. There was a dramatic, well-timed silence. "I'm afraid three pounds a week is out of the question," she said rather coldly. "Mother would never hear of it. But I would consider five pounds."

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## A PROPHECY

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AT LEAST once at every rehearsal Mr Pomeroy assured his company that Runaway Ronald or The Vagabond Earl was not a musical comedy but a comedy with music. The only time Drusilla saw him lose his temper was when the leading lady, with an air of stupidity that was only half affectation, asked him to explain the distinction. On other occasions of stress he didn't so much lose his temper as tear it up and throw it away, as something for which he had no further use. Such outbursts were three-parts histrionic, and sometimes they provoked a round of applause, which Mr Pomeroy, according to his humour, would either silence with a stare or acknowledge with a grin and a bow. He had no objection to your laughing at him, was even prepared to laugh with you, so long as you didn't spend too much time



over it. His authority was absolute, and no one dreamt of disputing it. When his devil rode him he would drill the chorus like a sergeant-major and treat the whole company as the medium of his personal art: not as men and women, not even (said some of them bitterly) as actors and actresses, but as bits of plastic material, to be bent and squeezed into the shapes his fancy required, and galvanized into action by his imperious will. If the best you could offer did not satisfy him, as sometimes by a heaven-sent miracle it did, he would put you through your paces as though you were a child learning to walk, would prescribe every gesture, and every detail of every gesture. "Put your hand on his shoulder. No, not like that. Here, give it me. So. Now smile up at him, and sigh a little. Come, you can't sigh with your mouth shut. Not so wide. Quarter of an inch. Here, give it me. Now begin again. Smile . . ." By these pain-giving tactics, which were in fact quite innocent of malice, it sometimes happened that Mr Pomeroy reduced a young lady to tears. Drusilla, witnessing one such scene from the wings, prayed earnestly that she might never so disgrace herself.

In saying that she had never thought of going on the stage Drusilla had spoken the strict truth; and her ambition to be a singer, though now somewhat tarnished by an over-long association with the amiable but limited Madame Rubin, was still keen enough to give colour to her pretended indifference to Mr Pomeroy's proposal. The notion of making the stage her career was one that did not particularly attract her, even now; but not for anything would she have missed this fun of dressing up, singing in the chorus, engaging the vagabond earl in a three-minutes conversation, and being paid five pounds a week. The first few rehearsals had been a mixture of torture and triumph, of

shy agony and disillusionment and delight. It was drab, confused, confusing; the dressing-up did not come till much later, and the excitement that Drusilla brought with her ended in a weariness verging on despair. Impossible that anything like a coherent performance should ever emerge from this muddle! But common sense asserted itself, reminding her that the burden of this responsibility did not after all rest solely upon her shoulders, and that possibly Mr Pomeroy, who did not seem unduly dismayed, knew what he was about. Her personal devotion to Mr Pomeroy became extreme, and she was delighted with the atmosphere of carefree slapdash facile friendliness in which she found herself. Being a young person of no importance she was ignored by the great and occasionally resented by individuals among the rank and file. But for the most part they all took her for granted and treated her as one of themselves: her beauty, her style, since she did not attempt to trade on it, was greatly in her favour with everyone except the leading lady, who made no secret of thinking that the scene in the desert, in which the Gipsy Queen comforts Runaway Ronald with prophecy, was the only serious blot on a play she positively adored. Drusilla, secure in the approval of Mr Pomeroy, and proudly resolved to justify it, did not die of these pinpricks, which seemed a small price to pay for entry into a world so queer, crazy, childish, strenuous, fascinating. To have escaped into this world from the narrow orbit of home was to be born again, a new person. For that very reason, perhaps, it had been necessary for Mrs Hewish to resist the change.

"Did you have a nice day with Sophia, dear?"

"Very nice, mamma."

"And how is the baby?"

"He seems a very nice baby," said Drusilla in a neutral tone, unwilling to expose her heart's passion. "Only one tooth so far."

"And was the play nice too?"

How systematic the inquisition was! To Drusilla's guilty conscience it had a planned and purposeful air.

"The play, mamma?" She was temporizing.

"Yes, dear. Didn't you say Sophia was taking you to a matinee?"

Drusilla turned her face away. "After luncheon," she remarked, quietly deliberate in manner though inwardly desperate and trembling, "I saw Charles Pomeroy."

"Did you, dear?" said Mrs Hewish innocently. "Well, I never can remember their names, but I'm sure he must be very clever. What did you see him in?"

"I saw him in his office," said Drusilla. "He offered me a part in his new comedy."

"Drusilla!"

Mrs Hewish instantly suspected the worst, and for that Drusilla could hardly blame her. That suspicion disposed of, she continued to reiterate that for Drusilla even to *think* of going on the stage would be *most* unwise. But in the same breath she was asking questions. What had Mr Pomeroy said? Did he admire her voice? Wasn't he rather famous in his own field? Had he behaved like a gentleman? And Drusilla, suddenly perceiving that the maternal heart was flattered, as well as alarmed, by this dramatic tribute to her handsomeness, overflowed into joyous excitement. Interrupting the flow of questions she embraced her mother with unthinking childlike ardour. "Isn't it lovely, mummy! And I'm to have five pounds a week!" Mrs Hewish, divided between laughter and anxiety, retorted by calling her "a

scandalous madam". And that was the end of the argument, and the beginning of Drusilla's career as an actress.

Several weeks passed, and much mouthing and miming was done, before the play began to take shape. For Drusilla it consisted of a variety of short scenes having no apparent connexion with each other, and she gathered the hazy impression that it was the work of some six or seven authors. But it was no part of her job to see the thing as a whole. Ronald the runaway earl, having fled the country for a reason not easy to discover (but it had something to do with mistaken identity and the matrimonial designs of his cousin Millicent), was accompanied in his travels by thirty-five lovely mannequins. Drusilla, when she wasn't being the Gipsy Queen, was one of the thirty-five. She enjoyed the singing and dancing, and she still more enjoyed the gipsying. "Cross my palm with silver, pretty gentleman!" It seemed an unqueenly request, but there was no disputing the royalty of her bearing. At the dress rehearsal everything went atrociously, and the proceedings ended with a despairing speech by Mr Pomeroy delivered in his best manner. Two minutes later he overtook her on her way to the dressing-rooms.

She glanced at him furtively, disconsolately.

"Hullo, my child! Why so glum?"

She was grateful, and surprised, that he didn't bite her head off. "Oh Mr Pomeroy, are we going to be dreadful tomorrow, do you think?"

"Dreadful? Why should we?" He rubbed his hands together cheerfully. "One of the worst dress rehearsals I've ever seen."

"Yes, I know," said Drusilla, remorsefully frowning.

Mr Pomeroy grinned. If he had been three inches taller

he would have patted her head. "*You* needn't worry, young woman. If you work hard, you'll get along very well."

She stood staring at him, dumb with gratitude.

"Can I trust you with a secret?" asked Mr Pomeroy.

Drusilla smiled. "Yes, please."

"Well, listen." He was serious now, almost conspiratorial. "A singer, no. You'll never be a singer. But in ten years time, if you work hard and do as I tell you, you'll be an actress second to none."

## PART TWO

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### ENCOUNTER

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- 8. A PREMONITION
- 9. ROBERT IS SURPRISED
- 10. TOM CORDWAINER
- 11. MOONRISE OVER CAMBRIDGE
- 12. MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING
- 13. ROBERT TO DRUSILLA
- 14. DRUSILLA TO ROBERT
- 15. DEATH AT KEWBURY STRAND
- 16. LOVERS IN DARKNESS
- 17. TOM AND CLARA
- 18. NEWS FOR DR HEWISH



## A PREMONITION

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So THIS is what I have missed, thought Drusilla, with a musing glance at Jinny Seagrave. The eyes that gathered-in the scene before her, in one warm dark glance enclosing Jinny, the two children, the cream-coloured drawing-room, the water-colours on the walls, the two men talking, and the tall window that defined a serene view of Cambridge-shire meadows, these eyes were ten years older than those which had shone, humble and grateful, in the moment of Mr Pomeroy's prediction, now abundantly fulfilled. The years had subtly ripened her beauty without adding to her apparent age and without altering her essential self. This sense of identity with the girl she had been in that other life, ages distant, was a taken-for-granted fact which at rare moments, such as this, seemed to Drusilla the chief mystery of her existence. The past she looked back on had already acquired the quality of a tale that is told, and told about someone else; yet she knew it to be no such thing, but a living reality. She had moved out of herself, into a populous world of events and acquaintances. Or was it that her self, breaking bounds, had annexed this larger world as its proper territory? The expanding sphere of her being still enclosed and must always enclose the innumerable smaller spheres that had once, each in its infinitesimal turn,



bounded her. She contained and resolved all the contradictions implicit in the coexistence of body and spirit, past and present, being and becoming. And she was for the most part unaware of them, as of all other metaphysical problems. She was living a life neither happy nor unhappy but crammed with busyness. Since her first appearance as an actress, and especially in the four or five dazzling years that had passed since Jinny Tetherdown became Jinny Seagrave, much, so much, had happened to change Drusilla: yet fundamentally she was unchanged. Touring the provinces, dingy lodgings, playing to empty and to crowded houses, hisses applause poverty success, quarrels reconciliations first-night speeches, rehearsing and rehearsing, playing Shakespeare Ibsen Shaw Pinero Jones Sardou Wills Wilson-Barrett and God-knows-who, repelling advances from gentlemen in dress suits, meeting Ellen Terry, having one's face on picture-postcards: these things, and a hundred warm brief friendships, had teased her, delighted her, taught her infinitely much, and left her unchanged.

So this is what I have missed. And this is what I have escaped. Her sentiment was complex, containing a little melancholy, a little irony, and a great deal of honest affection. On the whole, an agreeable mixture: she was enjoying herself. She was enjoying herself; she was enjoying Jinny, once her boon companion of the stage; and she was even enjoying, though with inevitable reservations, the prospect of taking part in an undergraduate production of a Shakespeare comedy. There was something touching in Jinny's material absorption in her four-year-old Frank and her two-year-old Celia, but it could not be denied that she had acquired a faintly irritating complacency since her marriage to this middle-aged Cambridge

don, Owen Seagrave. He, much as Drusilla liked him, did not seem quite to belong to the picture. Birds in their nest, kittens in a basket, mare and foal, cow and calf—it was odd, mused Drusilla, that the charm of domestic happiness depended on one's leaving the necessary negligible male out of account. A charming friend perhaps, an excellent uncle, but inconceivable as a husband, this spare, spry, simple, learned man, nearing fifty, whose freckles and fawn-coloured hair gave him the effect of being lightly sprinkled with sand. But even more inconceivable, in any human capacity, was the young man, Robert Cordwainer, with whom, furtively, with one nervous eye on his duties as host, Seagrave was talking learned shop, with occasional semi-malicious interruptions from Jinny. Seagrave's courtesies, though conventional in form, came she divined from the heart; but of Cordwainer—dark, intense, sombre young man—she was more doubtful. He was a research student, she had been told, and the cleverest of Owen Seagrave's disciples. But what attracted her attention to him was his extreme unawareness of herself.

"It's simply marvellous of you, Drusilla," said Jinny, "to come and play Beatrice for our young men. I'm sure I could never be so good-natured. Let me give you another cup, darling?"

Drusilla surrendered her cup. "My brother Philip has a sentiment for Cambridge," she explained. "And I have a sentiment for my brother Philip. That's the whole story."

"He's not up here, is he?"

"He was. At Jesus. He's in London now, earning his living."

She perceived, all too plainly, that Jinny had already stopped listening. Little Frank's dexterity with a piece of

bread and butter held the mother's admiring attention. To be neglected was nowadays an unusual experience for Drusilla, and it disconcerted her to find that she didn't altogether enjoy it. Yet her appetite for attention had not appreciably grown with the abundant nourishment it had lately received. There were even moments in which she altogether failed to enjoy being a public figure. At such moments she was visited by a sense of diminishing reality, as though some part of her essence were being stolen from her to provide stuffing for this shadow, this celebrated Drusilla Moore, which her "success" had mysteriously projected upon the world. There was something almost frightening in seeing that shadow wax fat and vigorous at the expense, as it seemed, of her true and intimate self; she had never quite got used to seeing her name shouted in print and her face confronting her from the pages of the illustrated weeklies; and when she read, half-eagerly half-reluctantly, her press-notices, something within her asked: Who is this woman that pretends to be me? Only last night, at the end of a long run in which she had scored once again "a personal triumph", she had smilingly faced a crowded theatre, taking her final call. The noise that rose at her, the caressing vibration that played upon her vanity from the vast being that filled the auditorium, these were always intoxication. Yet, last night, some part of her had stood aside, watchful and rather curious. And some breath of premonition had fluttered in her soul, some shadow from the future had fallen, provoking her to ask, in her secret being, whether the end of this play would prove to be also the end of an epoch in her own intimate life, and whether she would ever again, with an unburdened spirit, take pleasure in the play's triumph, the crowd's applause.

"Don't you find it inconvenient," she asked Jinny, "being so far from Cambridge? Four miles, isn't it?"

"We don't mind," answered Jinny. "We like it. Owen cycles in, every morning. He says it keeps him fit. No, darling! Not in the drawing-room!"

Owen Seagrave confirmed the edict. "Not in the drawing-room, Frankie!"

And Drusilla, wearied of these domesticities, sank back into herself, found there the memory of that strange nostalgia, and for a fraction of time lost sense of her present surroundings. Emerging from a moment's oblivion she found her glance resting on the darkly intent face of young Cordwainer, and had suddenly the sensation of playing a predestined part in a drama of which she had never seen the text.

As if awakened by her unthinking gaze, he turned his head and looked at her, and she was obliged to say something.

"Do tell me, Mr Cordwainer." She was dismayed to find herself embarrassed by his scrutiny. "Who is the William that Jinny keeps asking you about? Is he a joke?"

"I think he is to Mrs Seagrave," answered Robert Cordwainer. His voice was neither complaining nor disdainful. He merely stated a fact. But it was clear that the joke was one he could not share.

"Is he a secret too?" asked Drusilla, smiling.

All this, she thought, has been said and done before, in another life, in a dream. She had the illusion of knowing every word of his answer, every expressive modulation of his face. Though she could not have predicted his words, they seemed to fall pat to her expectation.

"William of Ockham," said Cordwainer. "He's been

dead nearly six hundred years. He revived nominalism, with a difference. I happen to be doing some work on him."

"How interesting!" she heard herself say. "But I'm afraid I don't know what nominalism is."

"I suppose not," said Cordwainer. "You're on the stage, aren't you?"

She was puzzled, nettled, amused. The cloud of dream was lifting. "I believe so," she said, rather distantly.

There was nothing worth remembering in these small exchanges, nor in the occasion that gave rise to them. There was no reason as yet why Drusilla, twenty years later, should find them clearly printed in her mind.

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## ROBERT IS SURPRISED

IN THE evening of the same day, Robert Cordwainer sat in his college room. In the outside world darkness was still three hours away. But to a sixth sense the room had a darkness, or a light, of its own: a gloom, a gleam, many-coloured, glowing, dark, a field of energy, a time-trap. The vibration of antiquity quickened the air of this place: the voices of vanished generations were stored in its silence: their words, rising from a printed page, came pricking their way to effectual resurrection in Robert's mind. With no sense of isolation, but rather with a sense at this moment of sanctuary, he lived in the middle ages, standing in a shaft of transparency, a tunnel bored through time, down which

the living past, remote and impersonal yet near and more significant than his personal past, streamed upon him, washing him clean of contact with the world of tea-parties and politeness, shrinking egoisms and social consciousness. With six books piled on the floor at his side, and a seventh open on his knees, he gathered his ghosts about him and was happy to be beset by reverend voices blandly intoning, furiously disputing: now enunciating the vast truism which is the prerequisite of all philosophy, *omnia exeunt in mysterium*: now taking the measure of that same mystery with a logical foot-rule, and snipping bits off it, a bit here a bit there, with a pair of logical scissors: now with much subtlety debating whether universals exist *ante res* or *post res*: now with malice and hatred and all uncharitableness smelling out heresies and pursuing their authors. Of the pathos heroism meanness and grandeur of these enterprises, Robert was little conscious: it was enough for him that Johannes Scotus in the ninth century had taught this and that, and that Marsiglio and Ockham, five hundred years later, had maintained that and this.

On a small table to his right lay a large black-bound book, in which from time to time he made entries, copying or condensing passages from his reading. The pages of this book were numbered, and each entry as it occurred was noted in an index. The entries already ran into hundreds.

"Good evening, Robert!"

Robert became aware that his friend Allchurch was in the room. On a blank page of his notebook he pencilled in his small neat hand: *universale intelligitur, singulare sentitur*. He closed the book thoughtfully, looked up at Allchurch, and grunted.

"Your oak was so very unsported," explained Allchurch.

"It seemed like an invitation."

Robert enjoyed Allchurch's company, and partly for that very reason was inclined to limit his ration of it: it would never do to let carefree conversation make an in-road upon the serious business of life. He knew that Allchurch liked to regard him as a taciturn unhumorous fellow, and he couldn't help playing up to this conception, which had truth in it but not the whole truth. Robert's sobriety evoked an equally special response from Allchurch, made him the more zealously flippant.

"Tobacco in the jar," said Robert, as Allchurch sank into the basket chair opposite him. "What's the news from E staircase?" he added, a trifle heavily.

"At my prep school," said Allchurch, who seldom condescended to answer conventional questions, "they used to call me Little Johnny No-Chapel. Do you think that was very witty of them, Robert?"

"Not very," said Robert. "I went to a very different school from yours."

At moments it still surprised him that the ambition of his boyhood should have been fulfilled. Nothing so improbable, he felt, had ever happened before. At such moments he saw a little boy climbing the big bare hill that stood between home and school. The child was dressed in knickerbockers patched at the knees, a blue-striped flannel shirt, a celluloid Eton collar broken at the back and rubbing his neck sore, and a jacket of which the cuffs were generally frayed. Robert was sometimes sorry for this little boy, who had seldom, however, been sorry for himself. Emily Cordwainer had been a devoted mother to him: she made him wash his ears every morning, and when he had a cold he was allowed as many as two pocket-handkerchiefs a

week. She wanted him to be "a credit" and to keep himself uncontaminated by the rough manners of his schoolmates. When she found lice in his head she put on her best clothes and went to complain to the headmaster. Robert remembered these things with shame and gratitude. On the big hill, which was flanked on both sides by green sloping fields, Bobbie and his friends found sheep-droppings, which they collected into paper bags and offered to their school-acquaintances as sweets. This was a great joke, but it was the kind of joke that Emily would have none of. She told him he must learn to be different.

She herself was "different", in aspiration if not in fact; and she was never again so much aware of the difference as on the morning when Tom Cordwainer the milkman, misconceiving or ignoring her status in Mrs Harbottle's household, casually inquired when was her next evening out. There was some excuse for him, indeed, since she herself was not quite sure whether the old lady regarded her as a maid-of-all-work privileged to companion her mistress or as a "companion-help" who must needs do the cooking and cleaning because there was no one else to do it. Being alone in the world, Emily was too much occupied with earning her living to wonder what her penurious middle-class parents would have thought of her present position or of Cordwainer's calm audacity. Nor did she give more than a passing thought to it herself. She was aware of some vital compulsion emanating from this man, and absurd though it would have appeared to Mrs Harbottle had she been privy to Emily's thoughts, absurd and even unseemly, the girl was pleasantly disturbed to find those sly confident brown eyes so intently regarding her. He was a tall loose-limbed fellow, not much older she judged than herself. An



untidy moustache straggled over his full lips, and heavy eyebrows gave an effect of ferocity which his dawning smile—with a glimpse of white teeth—contradicted. Standing in the little porch of Mrs Harbottle's new villa, which with its neighbours represented the first stage in the suburbanization of Fallow Green, he leaned negligently against the wall, waiting for his answer. His right hand still held the dipper with which he had just ladled out a pint and a half of warm milk into Emily's jug. For as many days as there are in six months he had served her with milk, and most often, since Mrs Harbottle entertained a hygienic superstition about milkcans, Emily had received him in person; but though she had glanced at him a hundred times she had never seen him until, in this moment, he became suddenly real to her, real, urgent, powerful: the first man among men to look with desire upon her mild bread-and-butter prettiness. She felt insulted, frightened, thrilled. What a liberty! To suggest that she . . . ! So far he had suggested nothing in plain words, but the implication of his question was evident, and perceiving her hesitation he broadened his smile and turned aside from the subject, as if content to have his question left unanswered. "Well, mustn't stand gossiping. That's not the way to work up my little business." He nodded, in half-friendly half-respectful fashion, and picking up his pail went clanking down the gravel-path. Staring at his back she felt herself turning crimson. So it was *his* little business, was it! And he wouldn't wait for an answer, wouldn't he! No one could pretend he was a gentleman, and yet . . . Guessing that he would turn at the gate to glance back at her, she shut the door hastily, biting her lip, and passionately resolving to keep him in his place.

Three months later they were married. Emily went to

the altar resolved that her husband should rise in the world, but life and Cordwainer, between them, contrived to defeat her resolution. His little dairy-farm was heavily mortgaged, and the vast influx of custom he had expected from the growth of the neighbourhood was captured by sundry limited companies and went to pay the salaries and increase the dividends of numerous people to whom the cow was no more than a fabulous creature illustrating page three in a child's alphabet. Tom Cordwainer, solacing himself with small ale, was glad enough, in the end, to get the job of cowman on a nearby farm run for his all-powerful rivals by a bailiff. Adversity did not improve his manners; disappointment did not make Emily a better woman; and moralists were obliged to look elsewhere for examples of perfection won through suffering. But Tom had a way with him, as the local girls found to their ultimate cost. He was selfish and easygoing, whereas Emily was unselfish and much given to planning and worrying. It is a moot point whether she did not have the best of the bargain. Tom was weak and drifting and goodnatured; and though the romantic figure that had caught her virgin fancy soon vanished, though the dark-eyed soft-speaking gipsyman of her imagining quickly gave place to an indolent animal intent on the meagre comforts within its reach, there was solace for her in the conviction that she was doing her duty by him. She bitterly wanted a child, and grew hungry with waiting. In the first five years she miscarried three times, and shame for her supposed physical inadequacy added its bitterness to her disappointment. On the third occasion, standing humbly before her husband, she was stung by his silence into proposing that he should get some other woman with child. Tom, shrugging his shoulders, said it didn't

matter, and wondered how much she knew of his casual amours. His own desire for parenthood, lacking the heat of her fond fancy, had largely spent itself: what little remained of it was merely the dim reflection of hers.

When Robert first began to make his acquaintance, Tom Cordwainer, though still a young man, had for the time being left all ambition behind except the ambition to make himself easy. It was at this time that an unexpected windfall enabled Emily to acquire the lease of a tobacconist and stationer's shop, over the door of which was inscribed, now and henceforward:

T. CORDWAINER, late  
LINNEY

The shop continued to be known as Linney's: which fact afterwards afforded Robert a satisfaction he was ashamed to confess to. Cordwainer, though recognizing the benignity of providence, did not take very kindly to shopkeeping, and before long he found an excuse for buying a horse and cart and setting up as the local carrier, an occupation which better suited his roving disposition. Emily ran the shop single-handed and seemed content to do so. She never, in Robert's hearing, opened her lips in criticism of her husband, his moroseness, his unseasonable hilarities, his bouts of tipling; nor did she, however, respond with any heart to his occasional effusions of affection. At such times he had the air of magnanimously forgiving her for being married to a scamp. "Dang it, old girl, we'll let bygones be bygones, that's what we'll do," he would say, generously ready to overlook his trifling misdemeanours, and he was perplexed, as well as discontented, by her failure to rise to the high sentimental occasion. "Very well, dear," she would answer,

but her smile was perfunctory. He sometimes wondered why he had married this thin-lipped, conscientious, uncensorious woman. "Your mother's a lady, that's the truth of it," he once confided to young Robert. "I'm not quite her style, son." Robert remembered this saying with compunction, but he was Emily's boy: it was to her that he looked as a child for the materials with which to build his private world, for affection and fancy and news of the world without, and from her that he learned to take the most fantastic ambitions for granted. His mind was quick; he proved eminently teachable; his appetite for knowledge was voracious. Where these qualities would lead him he did not pause to inquire: it was enough that by reading and reading he could make himself free of time and space. And, planted by Emily, the idea grew in his mind that somewhere in the world there were people who lived surrounded by books which they could read all day and night if they so chose. "But they had to learn their lessons first," said Emily, taking the book away from him. "Now get on with your sums, dearie, and be a good boy." It was a book, the first of many, borrowed from Mr Higgins the stationer, whose uncle—"fond of a-bit of a read, like yourself, Bobbie"—had left him, for remembrance, four or five hundred miscellaneous volumes. "I see you with your nose in a book the other day," explained Mr Higgins, handing him a ball of string in exchange for his penny. "Walking down the street with your nose in a book. I *had* to laugh. Well if it's books you want, boy, this is the shop to come to. Step in here." Lifting the flap of his counter he conducted his young friend into the private quarters of his establishment and upstairs to an attic room. "Here you are, if books is your fancy. Don't care to sell them. Matter of sentiment." He

left Robert to himself, and the boy spent an excited hour burrowing among the dusty piles. When he came downstairs dazed and delighted, Mr Higgins shouted with laughter at sight of his grimy face. He was an easily amused man. "Proper sweep you are! Well, what did you find? That's right. And when you want another, you're welcome to it."

Mr Higgins was humbly proud to be of service to a child so extraordinary as to care for books, and he was not alone in this attitude. Emily herself, rejoicing to know that the teacher took a special interest in her boy's rapid progress, was at pains to see that self-confidence should not give rise to self-complacency. She insisted, perhaps a little too often, on the goodness and kindness of Tom Cordwainer. "You're luckier than your dad, Bobbie. He never had a chance, remember." Her anxiety proved needless. The danger for Robert was not so much personal vanity as total absorption in his own interests. His gratitude for benefactions, though impulsive and sincere, had something impersonal about it, and his various scholastic exploits, which marked the stages of that steep ascent, brought him satisfaction but scarcely surprise. Not until he found himself an undergraduate in cap and gown did he taste the full romantic flavour, and never had he savoured it so consciously, with so rapt and leisurely an appreciation, as now, sitting with Allchurch in his college room, an hour or less after his encounter with Drusilla.

"And now we're both here," he remarked, speaking his surprised thought.

"So we are," said Allchurch, nodding. He sat for a moment in silence, infected by Robert's contemplative mood. "By the way, I've got tickets for tomorrow's special attraction. *Much Ado* in the open air. The parts will be taken

by young gentlemen of the university, and the proceeds devoted to a good cause. But whether it's a Building Fund or a Cats' Home I can't remember. Oh, and there's a woman in it. Let joy be unconfined. Miss Drusilla Moore has generously consented to play Beatrice. What do you think, Robert? Shall we go?"

"We might do worse," admitted Robert.

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## TOM CORDWAINER IN PARENTHESIS

TOM CORDWAINER possessed an enviable talent for living in the moment. Instead of wasting time and energy brooding over his failure to earn a living and make a position for himself, he accepted, with the grace of resignation, the living and the position that Emily made for him. Beyond an occasional prick of pride, too brief and trifling to be noticed, his partial dependence on Emily's industry did not trouble him. Diligence and respectability came natural to Emily: to be busy was the very breath of her being. He was of another sort, sanguine and indolent. In his youth he had expected success and had worked for it, finding the work congenial; but when success, through no fault of his own, was seen to be eluding him, he shrugged his shoulders, and after a short period of anger and alarm accommodated himself to the fact of failure. To this acquiescence he was guided rather by a blind animal wisdom than by any conscious philosophy, and that the acquiescence was not ab-

solute his capricious humours proved. Had Emily's shop-keeping enterprise fallen short of the modest success that in fact it achieved, his character as well as his history would have assumed a different shape; but, things being as they were, he was what he was. So long as circumstances conspired for his comfort, so long as the tide carried him in an agreeable direction, he was willing enough to yield, to drift.

He was the last man in the world, you would have thought, to be troubled by the sense of time passing; and certainly had the question been put to him he would have failed to understand it until it had been translated into words of one syllable; and then he would have laughed it out of countenance. At forty-five he was in the prime of his age: body straight and reasonably supple, hair still crisp and dark and abundant, face lean and weather-beaten but with no hungry look, and eyes rayed with small fine wrinkles but ready enough still to sparkle with self-appreciation. He knew, without overmuch vanity, that he was a personable figure, and the knowledge helped to keep him in friendly humour. Yet it chanced that on a June morning he woke, belatedly, with a strange thought in his mind, a thought he quickly countered with another: I'm as young as ever I was. It was perhaps the first time in his life that he had found it necessary to make this assertion. Ten days ago, one of his public-house cronies, Ferguson by name, had fallen down dead in the tap-room of The Horse and Hedge. A man not many years older than himself. It had been a surprising event, but Cordwainer, though he was shocked and sorry like the rest of the boys, had been conscious of no intimate disturbance in himself; nor did he

now connect the thought of Ferguson's taking-off with this brand-new notion, just come into his head, that he was letting time slip unused through his fingers.

Having washed and shaved and dressed himself with unwonted thoughtfulness, and with a more anxious eye to the effect than usual, he went downstairs to his solitary breakfast. Emily had been busy in the shop an hour since, but hearing his step she came hurrying into the room to make his tea for him. It was on the tip of his tongue to say he could do it himself, but the offer would have been almost unprecedented, and Emily, who lived by routine, would have looked askance at it, wondering what was amiss. She knew her duty and did it, uncomplainingly; she never nagged him and seldom uttered a reproach. She worked hard, kept herself spick and span, and never threw it in his face that what he earned scarcely paid for his food and drink. He could not in justice have asked for a better wife, but at this moment he found himself half-wishing for a different one—a hearty vulgar woman who would condescend to quarrel with him sometimes, and drink beer with him, and not shrink into a pained silence, with a glance at the precious Bobbie, the moment a man's jokes verged on the bawdy. Emily was a saint, no doubt of it. He had been with her twenty years and she had given him everything—except fun.

Intent on her job she spared no glance for him. The shop-bell rang while she was pouring the boiling water into the teapot, and you could see, or fancy you saw, the vibration of that summons entering her spare devoted body. He had a particular reason this morning for wishing to catch her eye. He had a surprise ready for her.



"I'll go and see," he said, rising from his chair.

"Nonsense, Tom!" she briskly answered. "You have your breakfast. I'll be back to pour out when the tea's drawn."

Surely to goodness I can do that for myself, he thought moodily, raising his eyebrows at her vanishing figure. In all their years together he had failed to perceive that her teapot, to her, was a symbol, and the pouring out of his tea an act of love in which gentle self-assertion was mingled. He began eating his plate of ham. I'm not much use to her: that's the truth. Her virtues went for nothing in face of the fact that whether she wished it or not she had the knack of making him feel shabby. I suppose I don't treat her right. But expectation rose again at the sound of her return, and as she entered the room, making a bee-line for the sacred teapot, he felt pleasantly conscious of his new appearance, wondering, half-shyly, how soon she would notice and what she would say.

She handed him his cup of tea, and stood staring in the mildest surprise. "Why, Tom, if you haven't been and shaved off your moustache!"

He grinned, half-sheepish, half-triumphant, ready to take his cue from her comment. "That's me, old girl!"

"It certainly makes a great difference, doesn't it!" she said colourlessly, turning back to the shop.

"Well?" said Tom, his spirits damped. "Do you like it or don't you?" He couldn't quite keep a note of truculence out of his voice.

She paused in the doorway. The shop was empty of customers, but she was drawn back to it by the twin-facts that it was close on ten o'clock and that Tom and his waggon were due at the station in three-quarters of an hour.

"Oh I'm sure it's just as you like, dear. I expect it's a nice change for you."

"That's right," he said, growlingly. "And a change is just about what I want." She stood listening, submissively. Whatever he said he knew she wouldn't "answer back", and the knowledge was gall. He had taken his ease, sluggishly, in bed; but he wanted company with his breakfast, he wanted a Bit of Life—whether friendly or quarrelsome, it didn't much matter. He made a last effort, dangled a last bait. "The boy get off to school all right?"

"Yes, dear. Of course." She seemed vaguely puzzled by the unnecessary question. "Do you want me any more?" she asked patiently.

Hating her meekness, he grunted dismissal, and sat for a while frowning at the food and fingering the unaccustomed smoothness of his upper lip. He finished his breakfast in a desultory leisurely fashion, reading the morning paper between mouthfuls; then stamped his way out of the house, as heavily and noisily as possible by way of relieving his feelings, and went to the cobbled yard where the stable was. Having lifted the harness from its nail on the stable wall, he pushed on through the back door that gave into the paddock whence Polly, the brown nag, added a modest portion of grass to her daily income of oats. She was a goodhumoured beast and willing enough to work, especially for a man whose appetite for it was in no danger of becoming excessive. In younger and sprightlier days she had played elusive tricks with him when she saw the bridle in his hand. But now she was in the habit of greeting him serenely. This morning, as usual, she received her two lumps of sugar with the friendly comfortable air of wishing him all he wished himself; suffered herself to be bridled

and harnessed; and within four minutes of the encounter was standing between the shafts of her master's high-hooded waggon.

Before climbing into the driver's seat Tom Cordwainer strode across to the shop-door and put his head in.

"Emily! You there?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Shan't be in, dinnertime. See?"

Emily shut her lips tightly, then opened them to say: "Very well. Mind you remember to have something, though."

"You bet I will," growled Tom.

She faced him patiently. "Where are you going then?"

"Nowhere particular." He shut the door again, shutting himself out.

He could bear everything about Emily except that everlasting patience, he reflected, as Polly and the waggon carried him away from her. Dang me if the old nag ain't got more spunk in her, he said bitterly. But his ill humour soon vanished in the air of this summer's morning, an air genial yet exciting, full of warm unspoken promises. A nameless expectation ran in his veins. He was twenty years younger than he had been at breakfast: twenty years younger, and a free man, ripe for mischief. He had had these moods before, impulses to break away and start life afresh; but hitherto they had been featherweight fancies, lacking the sting of real desire, lacking the urgency that lay coiled in the thought of youth wasting, summertime slipping away; and always, before the notion could flower, it had faded and vanished, leaving only a little dust in the heart. Until this morning, less than a week since they had put Jimmy Ferguson underground, his go-as-you-please

idleness had been proof against the beckonings and sly hints now plucking at him and pouring down on him from the sky; and even now, though he had put money in his pocket and left a word in season with Emily, he did not plan to be away from home long. He planned in fact nothing whatever, being content to drive with a slack rein and let Polly take him where she chose. The responsibility, no new experience for her, lay lightly enough on her dumb sagacious mind. They arrived at the station in time to meet the first down train, in automatic accordance with the daily schedule. Here Tom collected sundry boxes and trunks and packing-cases, and having collected them he could think of no good reason against going his usual rounds and delivering them at their various destinations. This provided some loose silver to jingle in his trousers pocket, and he was able to get a meal of bread and cheese, when the time came, without opening his sovereign purse. That purse, so seldom carried, began to grow conspicuous in his consciousness. Its presence in his vest pocket seemed to commit him to an adventure which perhaps, after all, he was too lazy to indulge in. After his snack he drove to the station a second time, and hung about, waiting for the second fast train of the day, but waiting, as well, for something to happen in his mind—in his mind, yes, or outside it—that should put an end to his irresolution. For he was now in two minds whether or not he should go home to Emily after all, and live thereafter soberly and safe, faithful to comfort and a quiet life. The thumb and forefinger of his right hand moved to his upper lip and were surprised at what they found there. The flame flickered back into life. A man does not shave off a twenty-years-old moustache for nothing.

During his moment of pensiveness the train from

London had come in. Among the passengers emerging from the station he observed a young woman who, unlike the others, sauntered into the road as if undecided what to do next, and at last, while they went purposefully on their various ways, came to a standstill. In her wake came a sweating porter carrying a large tin trunk on his back. With royal graciousness she told him to put it down. She was tall and comely; she carried her head proudly but with a pride that was unconscious; her movements had a careless animal grace.

"He'll take your box for you," said the porter, jerking a thumb in Cordwainer's direction.

"Will he? Thanks, I'm sure." Without a glance at Cordwainer she pulled off her large picture-hat and exposed to the gaze of mankind a broad fair brow and a head of luxuriant hair of a warm bronze colour.

The box was lifted into the wagon. "Where's it to go, miss?" asked Tom, jealous that her eyes should spend their glances on vacancy rather than on him.

"Eh?" She looked up, and his eyes held her for a moment. "Mr Jones's place, Longharrow. It's labelled."

This he knew very well, but he longed to keep her in talk. Her speech smacked of farmhouse and hedgerow rather than of London whence she had come: he wanted more of it. His philandering days were done, these many years: an awkward little episode, which Emily came to hear about, had made him feel that it was best to keep out of trouble's way. But he had the use of his eyes still, and he knew a pretty piece when he saw one.

"Longharrow, that's a long step, miss. Would you like to ride with your box?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and his heart leaped to see the movement ripple like a slow wave down her body. "I'm in no hurry, thanks all the same."

"Please yourself," said Tom, picking up the reins. "But I'd rather you walked it than me."

"How far is it?" she innocently asked.

"Whoa, Polly!" He looked at her shrewdly. "Miss Clara Jones, Longharrow," he said, mocking. "Haven't you been there before?"

She laughed goodhumouredly and gave in. "All right. Have it your own way. Do I get up there beside you?"

"That's the idea," said Tom.

He refrained from offering a hand, perceiving, by her easy style, that this was not the first time she had got into a cart, and knowing that anything in the shape of gallantry might at this early stage be misunderstood, or, to put it another way, *not* misunderstood. He believed there was not much he didn't know about women. There were the warm ones, full of temper but ready for mischief if you caught 'em the right way; the cold ones who turned wooden in your arms; the other kind of cold ones who melted and came to boiling-point if you so much as squeezed a hand; and the eager ones, moist-eyed and spoony, dripping love like a leaky tap whenever a pair of trousers appeared on the horizon. Yes, he knew 'em all, and he knew, what was more, that this one, however things turned out, was in a class by herself. She was different; she was something you couldn't hardly believe in; best take no chances with such as her.

With these considerations drifting through his mind, drifting and losing themselves in a haze of unwonted brightness, he looked straight ahead, at Polly's large ears, and

drove in silence for half a mile. She's not thirty yet, not by a long way. Clara Jones. And she lives at Longharrow, I suppose, with her father.

It was Clara herself who broke the silence.

"I say! What about the other folk's baggages?"

The question startled him: all thought of his business had gone clean out of his mind. But he betrayed no confusion. "What about them, miss?"

"Well, I wasn't the only person on that train. Don't you usually call at the Goods Office to see what's come?"

"Maybe I do," agreed Tom, with a grin. "But I'm giving myself a bit of a holiday today."

She laughed. "You've got a nice day for it, I *will* say."

"You're right there." He murmured something to Polly, and the nag broke out of her trot and proceeded at a walking pace. "You said you weren't in a hurry, if I remember?"

He looked at the day with warm admiration. They had now left the world of houses behind for a while, and were moving between hedgerows and among green fields, with here and there a barn, a haystack, a flock of grazing sheep, and sometimes a few acres of young corn. In time these pleasures of the eye, in which Cordwainer had a countryman's sober satisfaction, would be swept away to make room for rows of red-brick villas, shops, gasworks, steam-laundries, a cemetery, and other amenities of civilization such as were already invading, and transforming week by week, the village of Fallow Green. But the time was not yet. The motor-car was a puling infant which few besides its parents and godfathers had set eyes on, and the petrol pump existed only in the mind of prophecy. Yet Cordwainer, knowing no better, contrived to enjoy the barren scene (there was not even a bungalow in sight): in fact he was beginning to feel

that he had never known such a day as this, except, perhaps, in his boyhood, a longish time ago.

"So you live at Longharrow, eh?"

"Who told you that?" she asked blandly.

He chuckled, liking her spirit. "And Mr Jones'll be your father, I lay?"

"He seems to think so," she admitted. This time she joined in his laughter, and after some further desultory exchanges she began suddenly: "Mr Cordwainer—I"

"Eh?" He turned, grinning, in surprise. "You know my name then, do you?"

"I've got eyes," she said.

"Yes, I noticed that." This was something like, he thought. They were getting on famous. "All the same, howjer know my name?"

"Written up on your cart, isn't it?"

My, what a girl, he thought. "You don't miss much, I can see. People mostly call me Tom."

"I shan't stop 'em," she rejoined coolly. "But listen here. You said you was taking a holiday."

"That's right."

"What about going down *that* way for a bit?" She pointed to the left of the forked roads just ahead.

He glanced at her quizzingly. "That's not the Longharrow road." He kept Polly's head to the left and before his passenger had made up her mind to answer they were moving—at a trot now—along a road that would miss Longharrow by a comfortable five miles.

Now what did she mean by that? He drove on, biding his time, keeping his mouth shut. He was not the man to jump to conclusions, not with a young woman of *her* style. A word out of place and the fat would be in the fire. Pa-



tience was best. Underneath the matter-of-fact calm of his demeanour his thoughts were running wild and free, his hopes glancing at radiant possibilities; but caution and a newly discovered humility were in ultimate command of them. He was sharply aware of her body, languid, lazy, alive; of her grace and assurance; of her warm freckled face and her breasts rising and falling under a cotton blouse. The hands that lay folded in her lap were large and capable, full of common sense. Yes, she was a beauty all right, and lady-like, you might say, but not so much of a lady that you needed to be afraid of her. Stylish she was, a good ripe girl and pretty as paint, but not, thank heaven, too classy. Her speech had flavour; her skin was like peaches; and her eyes were something to remember.

"I expect you think I'm a funny sort," she said, "changing my tune like this."

"Suits me all right," answered Tom. "You couldn't want a better day for a drive."

The next time she spoke there was a new hesitancy in her voice. "You see, I don't know as I much want to go home."

"Not today, you mean?"

"Not any day." He glanced at her quickly. She was staring rather fixedly into her lap, and her fingers, now unclashed, moved restlessly. "But of course," she said, suddenly confronting him, "there's no call to take you out of your road like this."

"Don't you mind that," he said. The tumult of his senses died down. He looked at her with a kindness and a curiosity that for the moment were disinterested. "What's on your mind? Suppose you tell me and have done with it, eh?" He drew in to the side of the road. "We'll give the old girl a rest."

"All right. You won't give me away." The statement, for statement it was, gave him grave pleasure. "You see, my dad, he's married again, and me and her don't agree. We're of an age, almost, and we don't agree."

Tom Cordwainer nodded, and waited for more.

"I've been in service, up London. And this morning there was words." Her lips curved with a faint smile as she recalled those words.

"And Missus gave you the sack, eh?"

"I had my notice," agreed Clara Jones. "*And* my month's wages," she added grimly. "And here I am."

"Here you are," said Tom cordially. "And you couldn't be in a better place if you ask me."

"Think so?"

He expanded into confidence. "You and me'll get on together," he declared, with a touch of self-complacency.

She gave him a sidelong ironical glance. "You like yourself pretty well, don't you?"

"Pretty well," he agreed, with undaunted cheerfulness. "And what's more I like you, Miss Clara."

She tossed her head. "That's your affair."

"So it is, so it is." Time enough for that kind of talk, he thought. There's all the day before us, simmingly. And the night? We'll see.

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## MOONRISE OVER CAMBRIDGE

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TOM's exodus from Fallow Green, on a June day in the late summer of his life, was ten years distant from this other June day, Robert's day, towards the close of which, having taken tea at the house of the Owen Seagraves, having met there a celebrated actress from London and signally failed to make himself agreeable to her, having eaten his dinner in Hall with his fellow Bachelors, having communed with his mediaeval masters and suffered (and enjoyed suffering) a visit from Henry Allchurch, the young man now sits by a window in his room at college, watching the shadows in the quadrangle lengthen, the light grow dim, the green of the great lawn change colour. The choir of birds, from the many-tree'd Fellows' Garden nearby, thinned gradually away, as one after another the voices were gathered in by sleep, until at last it seemed that only one throat was left wakeful, to utter at intervals a phrase of three crystal notes, a call the more clear and personal because of the silence intervening, the dusk environing.

Robert listened intently for this repeated call, puzzled by the reflection that it meant so much yet meant nothing. The bird and its music were thoughtless, aimless, and, as likely as not, joyless: Robert could find no good reason for his emotion and was therefore inclined to disapprove of

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it. Art, he said, that's another matter. Art is a communication between one mind and other minds. There's sense and reason in that. But your thrush is no artist, and its song is not the product of a mind. Does that matter, since the song is beautiful? The noise of the bird, no matter what its origin, is a beautiful noise: it moves me. Why, then, must I probe further? Ah, but what is "beautiful," what is "beauty"? Beauty is a feeling: it is not something felt. Plato? Why have we let ourselves be hypnotized by Plato, a fellow so dazzled by his own literary genius as to be incapable of distinguishing between logical fictions and real entities? There's the epistemological problem too. It's possible that both the bird and its song are constructs of my own mind. But that, ultimately, leads to solipsism, an intolerably dreary conclusion. So let us assume that there *is* a bird, apart from my consciousness, and that the bird does sing. The bird, it is obvious, doesn't know or care what it is doing. So there's no question of art. Why, then, does the bird-noise affect me precisely as good art affects me? Why does it seem to have, as good art has, a profound meaning which could be expressed in no other form and is therefore (which is saying the same thing) insusceptible to translation? Why, in spite of that, does my mind stubbornly attempt such a translation and persist in trying to fasten a "meaning" upon the noise? Merely because I'm a sentimental ass, or for some better reason? The noise, since it is not the expression of a mind or mental state, can have no meaning. The noise is itself and only itself. Unless, if you like, it is the expression, the utterance, of a universal mind. Why and to whom uttered? To whom but to itself? If the universe is God's utterance, God is in effect talking to himself. But what's this, said Robert, what's this but solipsism

in terms of infinity? Yet that's an absurd conclusion, since the Many is a fact of experience, and the One only a necessary hypothesis.

But and Nevertheless and However: there was no end to the argument. So having nagg'd his moment's beatitude out of existence Robert Cordwainer betook himself to bed, and to sleep.

Released from the busy intelligence to whose apron-strings it had been tied all day, the moon in Robert's mind shook herself free of him, hovered awhile above her native sensorium, casting a shadow on the sleeping face but filling the room with a soft glow, touching the bedrail with a milky streak, lending to shapes and objects, curves and rectangles, wooden surfaces, wallpaper, carpet, clothes heaped on a chair, washstand, basin and ewer like a duck on her nest, slippers standing sleek and ready at the bedside, socks fallen on the floor, curtains stirring in a freshet of air, lending to all these things a new individuality, so that while all were silent, and all but the curtains motionless, each, you would have said, was silent and motionless in its own different way. Then spinning and soaring into freedom, she rose, this moon, high and higher, becoming one with her sister in the sky, whence the light that was her sole substance flowed down upon the roofs and spires, the lawns and streets, that were the prone body of Cambridge; turning corners which tomorrow would be loud with bicycle-bells and the voices of young men in gowns and flannel trousers; slanting into the plate-glass windows of shops where Bachelors' hoods would be hired, and copies of Aristotle's *Ethics* bought and sold, and Longinus, and Paley's *Evidences* for freshmen with the Little-Go still confronting them, and half-pounds of butter, and crested

tobacco-jars, and college blazers, and pastries for tea-parties; flooding the length of King's Parade and the breadth of Market Square; silvering the lawns of Trinity, the backs of John's, the dark winding river; entering the cloisters which Milton's ghost inhabits; glancing upon the shade of Laurence Sterne as he paces the lawn at Jesus, with Coleridge unaware at his elbow; finding a way through slatted blinds and parting curtains to dwell for a moment on the sleeping shapes of men young and old, learned doctors and raw youths, each cranium a world, a universe enclosed, compact of light and darkness; and pointing pale fingers at the Senate House in which, before many hours should pass, young men by the hundred would assume with ceremony the first fine feathers of their scholarship. There were dark places that repelled the luminous contagion: walls standing behind a screen of darkness, corners inaccessible. Slow-moving shadows, cast by rigid verticals, advanced their flat extent—sharp-edged, velvet-soft—into the cool sheen of field and highway. But in advancing they surrendered some part of what they held, and the moon claimed it for her own.

Moonlight lay on the watered meadows of Grantchester and on the green level lands that surround Harston. It entered the bedroom where Drusilla lay sleeping, and touched her pillowed head. She woke, opened her eyes, turned over in bed. Sleep was gone: she began thinking, revolving the memories and the expectations that came together in this moment of time and constituted for her its very being, and the texture of her intimate self. The hour was unpropitious, an hour in which the most confident heart is tempted to entertain its shadowy terrors and vain regrets. So much of her life, it seemed, was spent, and so little of her desire achieved. That desire had neither face nor name: it lived

as a vague unrest, deep down, ready to leap into the mind at idle unguarded moments. She was a successful actress, applauded and envied. She found deep satisfaction in her work. But of a deeper satisfaction, of something transcending satisfaction, of this possibility she was at times unhappily aware. There was, it seemed, something dead in her that should have been alive. There was something that she could not feel, yet felt the lack of. These shadows on the mind did not cohere to form a thought: they did no more than colour her thoughts with an unreasoned melancholy. She was worried about the forthcoming play. Worried and nervous, like an inexperienced girl. What had induced her to consent to appear in an amateur production, to queen it among a company of nice awkward undergraduates who had only, poor dears, their good intentions to offer in place of skill? How could he possibly, that young Mr Henderson, play Benedick to her Beatrice? And how, if it came to that, could she play Beatrice to his Benedick? She had met the young man, the young brother of a close friend of Philip her own brother; had weakly, graciously, allowed herself to be persuaded by Philip; and had enjoyed the sense of her own generosity and the surprised gratitude it had evoked here in Cambridge. Now that she was committed, and beyond hope of respite, the enterprise seemed sheer madness. Nor was it vanity alone that moved her to these terrified reflections. To stage a personal triumph for herself would be easy, all too easy, so easy and so emphatically out of place as to be repugnant, unless, by some miracle, she could contrive to share that triumph with her fellow-players. To shine was a desire which perpetual gratification had blunted: to work with the team, to collaborate in a piece of artistic interpretation, itself a creative act, this was of

first importance to her. Seeing the performance as a whole, not as a mere excuse for Beatrice, she already identified herself with the rest of the company and shared in advance the discomfort of their inevitable failure. And in the open air, in daylight, without the illusion created by make-up and artificial lighting, young Henderson in his false beard would suggest rather a child at a Christmas party than the sardonic and richly crusted Benedick. It seemed impossible that the show could be anything but a series of recitations.

Thus Drusilla, in that wakeful hour. But presently, in spite of herself, she fell asleep again. And in the morning her fears seemed ungenerous, exaggerated, foolish; and if she still trembled at the thought of the coming performance, which she was to rehearse with the company this very day, that was only because to tremble, to be nervous, to have moments of panic and despair, was the tax her temperament always demanded of her on the eve of a first night, and always would demand. It was as if the fear of things going wrong were a necessary condition of things going right. This morning she felt she had a touch of fever. The omens were good.

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## MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

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THE letter of her prediction was in part fulfilled: a series of recitations the play largely was. But with all its faults it had moments of life, moments indeed of a peculiar fresh-



ness and bloom. The day was both soft and bright; the setting of the piece, the stage at once intimate and remote in spite of the sunshine, the scenery achieving a maximum of effect with a minimum of representation, was a triumph of unobtrusive ingenuity; and the voices of the young men, especially his who played Hero, charmed and amused Drusilla. And so, for one reason and another, she was happy: happy and too deeply engaged in her part to spare—even had she observed him—a thought for Robert Cordwainer, the most attentive member of her audience. While he watched her, and admired, a vague disturbance that had been troubling him for some days seemed to come to a head. He was surprised, when she was off the stage, to find himself waiting in an agony of impatience for her return. He found, moreover, a peculiar delicacy in her performance. That she should outshine her fellow-players was inevitable, but what Robert admired in her, startled by his own divining, was that by some invisible radiance, some compulsive enchantment, she made these others shine too, far beyond, he thought, their normal powers. From that moment the thought of Drusilla attended him: sometimes perceptibly, as a problem that could hardly be stated, still less solved; sometimes just out of sight; but never quite absent.

On the first day of the Long Vacation, this thought went with him into the train to London. It stepped out on the platform with him at King's Cross, and when he had passed the barrier, giving up his ticket, it took him by the sleeve and drew him into the street, instead of allowing him to proceed, according to programme, to his home at Fallow Green, fifteen stations away. He moved as in a dream, without clear aim or intention. He went into a post-office, and turned, irresolutely, the pages of the telephone-directory.

Half an hour later, much to his delight and alarm, he was following a middle-aged maidservant up the stairs of a house in Sloane Street.

At the door of the first-floor apartment the woman turned to him with a sudden doubt in her face.

"You *are* expected, aren't you, sir?"

"Yes," said Robert.

"You did say your name, didn't you, sir?"

"Cordwainer's the name. I've been talking to Miss Moore on the telephone."

He was terrified, but his voice was steady.

"Well, here we are then," said the woman, with a sudden access of cheerfulness. "Them stairs do take it out of a person."

Humbly grateful, he followed his guide into the presence of the celebrated Miss Moore.

She smiled a welcome. "You're just in time for tea."

Standing before her like a soldier he said: "It was very kind of you to let me come."

Drusilla smiled again, amusedly, thinking that he had not after all given her much alternative: his voice on the telephone had been so very urgent.

"Will you bring in the tea, please, Milly?"

Milly retired, and a silence fell, which Drusilla broke by asking: "Have you come to tell me about William, after all?"

He could hardly bring himself to smile at this mild railery, so confounded was he by the recollection of what he had said and not said at the Seagraves', fourteen days ago. "You must have thought me a fearful boor. I hardly dared to come. It must seem awful cheek." Here in Sloane Street, in this almost stately apartment, the distance between him-

self and this woman seemed greater than ever, even greater than when, lost among the audience, he had seen her as Beatrice. And yet . . . "I've only seen you twice before," he said, ingenuously.

"Twice?" she queried.

He ignored, or did not choose to notice, the question in her voice. "It's wonderful for me, being here like this." Milly came back, bringing in the tea-tray. Until she had left the room he stood frowning at the carpet.

"Sugar and milk?" asked Drusilla.

He received his cup of tea and sat down, firmly refusing food. "It's wonderful for me, being here like this," he repeated. "There are things I want to tell you, if you'll let me."

"I see no harm in it," said Drusilla. There was something curiously appealing in the oddness of this odd young man. "Owen Seagrave tells me," she added lightly, "that you're going to be a person of great eminence in the University."

"I want to tell you about my home," said Robert, staring at the empty grate. "It'll seem strange to you, living in all this grandeur. I'm really a very low class sort of person. I suppose that's obvious."

The awkwardness of the remark made Drusilla wince. She exclaimed, almost in anger: "Don't be ridiculous!" And with that one sharp word the ice was broken, formality vanished, communication became possible.

He gave her a surprised delighted glance, happy that she felt brotherly enough to rebuke him. "Am I being ridiculous?"

"Yes," she said, laughing. "But go on, if it's your nature." Banter quickly gave way to sympathy. She was famous for these transitions. "You were going to tell me about your

childhood. I think childhood's the best of us, don't you? We never outgrow it if we're lucky. When I was a child I lived by the river. . . ."

He watched, and listened, eagerly. Every tone, every small movement, had for him an incomparable beauty. The telephone-bell rang, and the way she moved to the instrument, picked up the receiver, and stood easily conversing with the unknown caller, invested that commonplace series of actions with a more than mortal grace. The thought flashed upon him that thousands must have admired her as he was admiring now. His vision was common property: he grew jealous of the gaping multitude. She came back to him unruffled by the interruption, without effort or consciousness taking up the talk at the point where they had left it. He was asking questions about her stage-career, no longer disposed to apologize for an ignorance that she took so blandly for granted. The afternoon sunlight, slanting in by a window at her back, divided the room into two separate regions and made for him a haze of brightness about her person, leaving the face comparatively dim, so that its eternal character, disengaged from the accidents of time and space, became visible in high relief. He felt the moment as a new revelation, and the climax of his conversion. Here was a woman: he had never seen woman before. His thoughts became confused, his questions and his answers haphazard; and he hardly noticed with how gradual a compulsion she was leading him back to himself.

It suddenly became imperative that he should confess his secrets to her, lest the temptation to avoid so doing should become too strong for him.

"My mother keeps a shop," he said. "Did you know?"

Embarrassed by his air of intensity, Drusilla received the

information with a somewhat exaggerated indifference.

"Does she?"

"Did you know that before?" he asked accusingly, deceived by her cool manner.

"No. How should I? . . . What sort of a shop is it?" she inquired politely, after a pause.

"Quite a dingy little shop, I assure you. She sells cigarettes, and string, and packets of notepaper."

Repelled by his tone she said quickly: "I hope you're not a snob, Mr Cordwainer."

He flushed. "I suppose I am." But he did not regret his self-betrayal, since it was succeeding in its design of forcing her to make light of his social misgivings. "It's easier for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Easier for you not to be snobbish," he explained awkwardly.

"Is it? I don't know. It's a dreary subject, anyhow." She softened the asperity with a smile. "Tell me more about your home. Is your father alive?"

"We don't know. He walked off one day and hasn't turned up since. I was only a boy then, and I don't remember him very well."

Drusilla laughed in surprise. "But, really! Didn't you or your mother make inquiries?"

"Mother had a postcard saying he was off for a bit of a holiday and she wasn't to worry. And that was the last we heard."

"He left his family unprovided for?"

"Oh, Mother did most of the providing. He was never much use in the shop, I fancy."

Drusilla contrived to laugh again. "I gather you had no

particular affection for him?"

Robert considered the question, but gave no direct answer. Presently he said: "The fact is I very much doubt whether he was my father at all." Encouraged by her attentive silence he elaborated the theme. "I don't know how the idea first got into my head. But once it came it stuck. And everything fell into place, like the pieces in a puzzle. In those days, and even after he'd gone, Mother was always ready to defend him, whenever I asked awkward questions. How good and kind he had been to her, she said, in spite of his little faults. She's not an educated woman, my mother, but she'd had more education than he. And . . . well, she's better in every way. It wasn't very clever of her to preach his virtues at me: his vices were obvious enough. It had the effect of apologizing for him, which was really the last thing she intended. I suppose when she saw I was going to be intelligent she was anxious for me not to be ashamed of him. Hence the preachments. Don't think I'm being malicious. I owe everything to my mother, everything. He glanced away, shyly. "She wanted me to be a gentleman. Pathetic, I know, but that's what she used to say. She was a martinet about manners, but it was always *my* manners, not his. His, of course, were past praying for. You see the irony of the situation? She was saying in effect: Here's your wonderful good kind father, and you must try to be as unlike him as you can. No wonder I began to smell a rat!"

Drusilla interposed a doubt. "Perhaps, after all, your rat is only a very small mouse. I still don't see why you imagine he isn't your real father."

"I know," he admitted. "It sounds a thin tale, and there's no proof. I expect, too, you think I'm being disloyal to my mother. I've thought of all that. I've thought of everything."

"You've thought too much," suggested Drusilla.

"Too much about myself, you mean. Well, no doubt I have. But there it is. I know all that you must be thinking. You think I'm sacrificing my mother's good name to my own vanity. You think the whole thing is a dream, a wish-fulfilment. You think I'm the kind of neurotic that longs to believe himself the son of a prince. Well, I've thought of that too. I assure you I've thought of everything. That may be the truth, but I don't think it is. I think the truth is that after five years or so of childless marriage my mother conceived some other man's child. With her husband's consent? No, that's too fantastic. But with his toleration after the event. Where did the money come from to pay for me here?—I mean at Cambridge. Not from my so-called father."

"But you went to Cambridge with a scholarship, didn't you?"

"Yes, but that wasn't enough to keep me going. I've never said a word of this to anyone else," Robert suddenly said, looking at her meaningfully. "It never occurred to me that I could. Do you think it caddish of me?"

"Not caddish," said Drusilla. "But perhaps a little unfair."

"To my mother, you mean. But you don't imagine that I think the worse of my mother, do you?"

"No. But you might have imagined that I should," Drusilla reminded him.

"No," said Robert. "You're the one person in the world I could be sure of. That's why—" He broke off.

"But you don't know me," she protested, laughing.

"I do know you. I'm in love with you."

The moment these words were spoken he was conscious of an immense relief, as of something achieved, some proc-

ess brought to fruition. Laboriously he had fought and talked his way to this simple tremendous conclusion. The pause that followed his avowal, a pause in which his heart seemed to wait for a word that would set it beating again, was charged with all the accumulated beauty and terror that had beclouded his mind for so many days: the cloud had burst, spilling the scent and sound and colour of eternity into this fugitive instant of time. His eyes were on Drusilla, but the room with all its particulars attended him, and substrate to his thought, which was filled with her, was a sensation of wonder and surprise. I am here and now: all the meaning of the world crowds to a point.

"You're in love with me?" she echoed.

His "Yes" was scarcely audible, but his eyes did not falter from hers.

"Well, that's very nice," said Drusilla, smiling kindly. But the beat of her pulse gave the lie to her pretence of humour.

He answered passionately: "It's not nice. It's not nice. It's heaven or it's hell. It's not *nice*. Don't humour me. Don't treat me like a child. I tell you I'm in love with you. You're everything I want."

To her own bewilderment, Drusilla found herself trembling. "I'm sorry. But you must see how absurd it is." Quickly, in her mind, she spread for him a medicinal feast of reason and candour: he was not the first romantic young man she had encountered. "People *do* sometimes think they're in love with me. I suppose it's because I'm an actress. But they soon get over it, and so will you. You're very young, aren't you."

"It was a statement, but he chose to regard it as a question. "I'm twenty-five."



"You see?" said Drusilla. "What more need we say?"

He took a step towards her. She moved easily away towards the window. "You can't escape like that," he said. "I've told you I love you. This is the most real thing that ever happened. I've been dead all my life. Now I'm alive. . . . Oh can't you say something?"

"What *can* I say?" Her glance sought the window. "What do you want?"

"You," said Robert.

She turned to him, as if at bay. "Do you mean you want to make love to me?"

His face slowly crimsoned: his eyes widened with horror. "Good God, I want you to marry me! What else could I want!"

He was hurt, shocked, appalled.

"You see?" she said again, greeting with rueful triumph this evidence of his immaturity. "That kind of talk is foolishness, isn't it?"

"You mean you don't love me," he said wretchedly. "Of course you don't! Why should you!" But after a silence he began to argue himself out of this sorry conviction. "How do you know you don't love me? Perhaps you do, or perhaps you will. I know it's fantastic, you and I. You famous and so lovely, and I nothing at all. But how can you know—yet? Perhaps if you gave yourself a chance . . . gave me a chance . . ."

"My dear boy!" She came to him with royal compassion, offering her hands. "You don't know what you're saying. It isn't a question of my loving you or not loving you. I like you very much. I think I'm going to be very fond of you. But as for marrying you, it's just absurd. I'm not marrying anyone. And certainly I'm not marrying a boy of twenty-

five."

"Why?" asked Robert stubbornly.

With a laugh she slipped her hands from his and moved away. "Are you so ungallant as to force a woman to tell you her age?"

"Oh *that!*" cried Robert, eagerly scornful. "What if you *are* a year or two older than I am? Do you think—"

"I'm thirty-six," said Drusilla sharply.

She watched him intently but could discern no telltale change in his expression. "It's incredible of course," he declared, meeting her look steadily. "But I'll believe it if you say so. But do you imagine"—excitement came back into his voice—"that it matters two straws to me how old you are?"

"Perhaps not, at the moment," conceded Drusilla. "But it matters to me. That doesn't seem to have occurred to you," she appended, mildly satirical.

She sat down. He remained standing and gazing.

By drawing him into argument she had contrived to sidetrack his emotion and control her own. But now, despite her wish but obedient to her need, there fell a silence between them. The disputing voices ceased; the hurrying thoughts faltered at a check, turned back, lost direction, stood irresolute; and these two, he and she, having no words to cling to, no thoughts to hide behind, were gathered by silence into itself, the ground of being, the quick dark presence that slumbers not nor sleeps. Coming back to the surface she asked herself what had happened to her. To all appearance nothing had happened. There was Robert and here was she. They were looking at each other. Neither had moved.

With an effort, and without rising, she held out her hand,

saying: "Good bye, Robert. You must go now."

He took the hand in both his own and kissed it despairingly. And suddenly he was on his knees, hiding his face in her lap.

At the touch of his lips, the trembling of his body, her blood leapt and her heart yearned. "Darling, you mustn't!" With her disengaged hand she lightly stroked his hair. Too late to wish the words unsaid. "You must get up—*please!*"

What lay behind that appeal he was too young, or too slow, to perceive. He stood up, turning his face away. "I suppose I must go."

Drusilla rose, hoping he would go quickly. "Yes. But where?"

"Home. To my mother. Where else?"

"Where does she live?" asked Drusilla, seizing quickly on the chance of a neutral question.

"At Fallow Green. I don't suppose you've heard of the place."

Drusilla forced a smile. "And I don't suppose you've heard of High Findon."

"Of course. It's quite near us." A flicker of interest struggled through his wretchedness. "Do you know it?"

"We lived there for twelve years," said Drusilla. "The first twelve."

"You! But I thought you said . . . a river?"

"That was afterwards." She laughed. "So we're almost fellow-parishioners, aren't we?"

He stood irresolute. "Can't you come and dine with me somewhere?"

She shook her head. "Not tonight. Go home to your mother."

He turned to the door. "Good bye then."

"Don't be unhappy," she said, pleadingly. "And, Robert!"

"Yes?"

"If you feel you want to write to me—well, do. We needn't be tragic about it, need we?"

The door closed behind him. She listened to his slow descent of the stairs. And when she could hear his footsteps no more, the room became suddenly empty. She wondered if there would be a letter in the morning.

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## ROBERT TO DRUSILLA

UNTIL yesterday (wrote Robert) I didn't know what had been happening to me during these last two weeks. I mean I didn't know whether it was real or imaginary. That's very clumsily put. Where experience is in question "real" and "imaginary" is a shallow dichotomy. Logically, experience is experience and does not admit of degrees of reality. However I mustn't ride off on that horse. The fact is it's by no means an easy job writing to you here, in my mother's parlour (as she calls it), with all the bits and pieces of my old life around me, and my mother, not watching me—no she's rather carefully *not* watching me—but waiting, carefully neutral, and hoping that I'll soon have done and begin talking to her. A good long talk is what she wants. Boyish outpouring—you know the kind of thing. (How should you? But you do. I feel that you know everything that mat-

ters.) And somehow I can't rise to it. It makes me feel guilty that I can't, but feeling guilty doesn't help. It's been a queer homecoming. It is always a little queer, because one has to try, out of loyalty and so on, to get back into one's old self, and that skin no longer quite fits. Out of loyalty I say, but I don't mean anything priggish or merely perfunctory. I mean, putting it bluntly, that I'm very much attached to my mother, whether I like it or not. I hate disappointing her, and I hate myself for noticing the drabness and pokiness of this domestic interior. It's odd that I can't take it for granted, seeing that I was born and brought up in it, and never, until I went up to Cambridge, knew anything different. Odd that I've so quickly become acclimatized to a world where I don't really belong. Yet in fact I seem to belong to it more than to this one. This one, for all its homeliness and familiarity, seems almost foreign to me after my rooms at Cambridge—which you have never seen, though you've been there, with me, so much these last fourteen days. Yes it's absurd, but this cottage seems unreal and alien to me, and everything in it except my mother. Or perhaps I only pretend that it does, because I want it to be so. There is always one's vanity to take into account. I expect it was a kind of inverted vanity that made me inflict that long story on you about my poverty-stricken childhood and the rest of it. I pretended to myself that it was a noble passion for honesty—how determined one is to think well of oneself! I even pretended to believe—or half pretended—that I was taking the risk of your disdaining me on account of my humble origin. And all the while, as I now see with uncomfortable clarity, I was trying to cut a romantic figure and force you to take notice of me, counting very confidently on your discernment and sympathy and even—

let me face it—your womanly compassion. Oh yes I played up for pity, didn't I? And now perhaps I'm playing up for admiration of my frankness. I warn you I haven't come to the end of my false pretences, and moreover I shall always try to throw dust in your lovely eyes by being the first to expose those same false pretences. I know I am being difficult and inconsiderate and in short a nuisance. But I can't see any help for it, except that you should marry me.

Already since that strange afternoon at Cambridge I've died and been born again. The idea of going without you is something I simply can't face. Yesterday after leaving you I believed that I could live for ever—happily—on what you had already given me, letting me speak to you as I did, and touch you. That notion survived for perhaps half an hour, and then the pain began, the longing to see you again, the feeling that our parting had happened a hundred years ago—and that it hadn't really happened at all, that you were still with me but somehow beyond reach and hearing. I tell you plainly I can't go on living to any sort of purpose if you will not or cannot love me. Compared with my desperate need of you the disparity in our ages is trivial—an academic objection. You must think of something more real than that if you are determined to escape me. You called me darling. I shall never forget that. Don't don't try to explain it away. If you like, it commits you to nothing. But you did say it. And I'm not to be put off with maternal kindness. Don't pretend I'm a pathetic, simple, romantic young man who has to be humoured and weaned from his nonsense. That kind of feminine evasion would be infinitely unworthy of such miraculous sincerity as yours. I'm not simple, or romantic either. I'm a bag of intellectual tricks, sincere in nothing except loving you—or sincere in nothing

so *much* as in loving you. I'm rather conceited, as you'll find out if you haven't already done so, and with my conceit there goes an ugly secret shame which I'm ashamed of. Vanity too. It's difficult to sort these things out, but they're all there, an uneasy mixture. It is that same inverted vanity that makes me feel it to be a kind of presumption that I should be writing to you at all. If you could see this room, my home—dingy, poky, everything in the worst of taste—if you could see all this, and me in it, belonging to it, you would wonder at my having the impudence to insist that I love you. That's what I tell myself, but of course you wouldn't really. Being you, you couldn't. I suppose there's melodrama in my blood, the true lower class taint which I shall never quite get rid of. I shall always sometimes see us, you and me, as the queen and the beggarman.

Much of this self-analysis is only half-true, or not true at all. What I think I mean is that it is out of date. It is true of the man I was, but not of the man you've made me. I am now an integrated personality instead of a bundle of vanities and misgivings, and it's you that have made me so—not by anything you've said or done but simply by being you, by existing. You are the whole meaning of life for me. Everything that has reality for me derives its reality from you. That's why this has been such a queer homecoming. The people here seem unsubstantial. Even my mother is a little dim. I'm afraid she may be also a little unhappy, but though I said just now that I hated myself for disappointing her, that was only a conventional remark, the kind of thing one thinks one ought to feel and say. I can think of nothing but you, and somehow I can't bring myself to speak of you to my mother. Ever since our first meeting you've haunted me. At first, as I say, I didn't realize what was

happening. When I got back to my rooms that evening I sat down to work as though nothing had happened. For all I knew, nothing *had* happened. I had been to tea with the Seagraves, met a beautiful woman, and behaved with my usual clodhopper clumsiness. That was all. I was vexed with myself, but not otherwise disturbed so far as I knew. So I sat and kept my shop (that is, read mediaeval philosophy) as if nothing had happened. Then a friend of mine, Allchurch, burst in. I want you to meet him some time. Or don't I? Anyhow he's a very good friend. Much given to buffooning, but only of the verbal kind, thank God, and infinitely goodnatured. Well he came in and began prattling. And it wasn't until he mentioned your name, quite by chance, that I began to suspect you were somehow important to me. Even then I didn't know how or why. Then came the play. Now let's get this clear. You were marvellous as Beatrice. Naturally. You've been told that a thousand times. But it's not Beatrice I'm in love with. It's you, you, with or without the footlights. Where have I got to? Well, then the haunting began. At odd times, and without any reason at all, you kept coming into my mind—the way you looked and spoke, a tone, a movement, anything. I couldn't read, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't think—except about you. I hadn't the smallest intention of pursuing you. The idea was absurd. Besides it wasn't part of my plan. I'd got everything mapped out, and everything didn't include you or any other woman. And needless to say it didn't include coming to see you in London. That seemed to happen almost by accident. In the train from Cambridge I hadn't the remotest hope or thought of seeing you or trying to see you. Nothing so audacious entered my mind. Yet I hadn't been in London half an hour before I found myself in a post-office, telephon-



ing. You sounded surprised, but you weren't so surprised as I was.

When I knocked at your door I felt frightened and deflated. I was on the point of discovering whether you were a real person or an invention of my own. If you were real I felt it would be like coming into the presence of God. If that sounds extravagant I can't help it. It's sober truth to me. When I saw you I wasn't afraid any more. I was fulfilled and in heaven. You were different from my dream of you. You were perfect. Merely to be in the same room with you was the purest ecstasy. But nothing one can say is of any use. Don't imagine I'm romantic—or young either. I'm only young in years. I think you are really younger than I am. I'm still shy of saying your name. Drusilla. I can only say it when I'm away from you. I've just read this letter through from the beginning and I don't know whether I can bring myself to send it. I'm appalled by its garrulous egoism. Am I really like that? Or am I the rather stupid dumb person who came to see you yesterday? Neither, I expect. Something between the two perhaps. But anyhow I've changed since yesterday. I've even changed since I began writing this letter. Because I love you I'm changing all the time, getting rid of the dirty sediment that lies at the bottom of my mind. I can feel the process going on. So you needn't believe anything I say except that I love you. That's the one certain thing in the world.

Look, this is what is going to happen. Before I'm very much older I shall be a Fellow of my college. There's very little doubt of that. Then it will be possible for me to marry. It's possible now, but then it will be possible without too much indignity to you. I know I must try to be patient and give you time to consider, so I leave the question with you.

Don't answer it until you can say yes. It's difficult to bring this letter to an end. It goes on and on and says nothing. It goes on because while I'm writing it I have the blessed illusion of being with you. If I write to you again soon it will be for the same reason, not to pester you. I shall try not to write until I have a word from you. But I can't promise anything.

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DRUSILLA TO ROBERT

BUT my dearest Robert I call everybody darling or nearly everybody. Everybody I like let's say. And of course you're one of the people I like. I'd say more I'd say I was very fond of you if I weren't afraid of your bringing it up against me and suing me for breach of promise on the strength of it. Really my dear you must try and calm down a little else what am I to do with you! You're the most sudden and alarming person to come bursting like this into my placid middle-aged life and expect me to drop my knitting and embroidery and crochet-work and rehearsals and throw all my managers out of the window and rush headlong to the altar with you. Only metaphorical knitting as it happens though don't you believe the silly tale about actresses not being domesticated. You have an unfair advantage of me I think, because I can't be cross with someone I like so much. And cross is what I ought to be. Instead of that I'm only sad to think of you sitting there *brooding*—when you ought

to be working or enjoying yourself. I used to be never happy except when I was working, working so hard that there was no time to stop and think, but now I enjoy not working almost as much. Only occasionally, it's true. But that's a sign of advancing years my dear boy, don't make any mistake about it. Only occasionally though—I should hate to have nothing to do for long, and dreadfully miss acting and dressing up and showing off and being made a tremendous fuss of. That's my life and I like it and I don't in the least intend to change it. You say you're not going to be put off with maternal kindness, which is not the most tactful remark in the world to make to a woman who is as it happens eleven years older than yourself. But anyhow perhaps aunt is more in my line. Let me be the youngest of your aunts Robert. The sister business has been overdone.

You'll hate me for being flippant but I do insist that we mustn't let ourselves be too dreadfully serious about this attack of yours. Such lovely lovely things you've said to me and your letter made me want to cry. Honestly Robert it's no fun to me to be for ever talking about the disparity in age that you can't or won't see the importance of. But there it is. In four years I shall be forty and you'll be—twenty-nine, isn't it? I daresay I shall be quite passably attractive at forty, as any woman can if nature has given her a start, but I shan't be the right woman for any man of twenty-nine. If it's marriage you're talking about (and how dreadfully beautifully shocked you were at my supposing anything else!) you really must give a little thought to the future. Tell your mother about me, do. She'll not leave you in any doubt about what you ought to do. Not that I don't hate the idea of being discussed in such a connexion—sometimes I

*am* almost angry with you for making it necessary. But above all I know I'm going to feel it very much if you make yourself unhappy about me. Much the best thing would be for you to take your mother away for a little holiday somewhere, it would do you both good and give you time to see things in their proper perspective—and by things I mean me—couldn't that be managed, I mean is there anybody any neighbour who would take over the shop for her? I do thank you a thousand times for writing to me like that and for feeling as you do about me, but please simmer down a little, it will only make you unhappy if you don't, and me too. You're a terrible responsibility Robert—rehearsal in twenty minutes, a brand new play too, and how can I give my mind to the job with you in such a state! But there's one comfort—you're not romantic. You tell me so three times in your letter so it must be true. That's a great comfort. You meet a woman at a little tea-party and fourteen days later—not a word said in the interval—you ask her to marry you! A really romantic young man wouldn't have waited half so long, I'm sure. Is that how your mediaeval philosophers used to behave? Never mind. I must go now. I think of you a lot Robert and I do very much want you to be sensible and happy. So please do be, for my sake. Affectionately, D.M.

*Ten days later:* My dear impossible Robert, I must say you are rather an ungrateful creature. I answered your long letter by return of post and made myself late for rehearsal and all I get for my pains is three more from you as wild as ever and mostly abuse. Well if it's not abuse what is it pray? That's what it looks like to my simple mind. You have the cool nerve to accuse me of writing you an *actressy* letter. I'm more like an actress in my letter you say, than I am in

myself, and you make that the excuse for not taking anything I say seriously. You even suggest that I leave out commas for effect. Yes I am very nearly cross with you. But not quite, because there's something very touching and sweet about you even when you're trying to be a bully, and you're welcome to make what you like of that admission. We're going to be great friends and you're going to be sensible. Since writing this I've heard from home that my mother is ill. I must go to her. Best love. D.M.

*From Kewbury Strand, dated August 2nd:* Your letter came this morning. I don't know when I shall be able to answer it. My mother is very ill indeed and everything else seems rather unreal and far away, even this war the papers are so full of. So you must be patient Robert. I send you my love. Drusilla.

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## DEATH AT KEWBURY STRAND

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IN THE middle of a September morning, a fortnight after the First Battle of the Marne, Drusilla stood watching her mother die. Dr Hewish, with an air of detachment, stared out of the window, sunlight shining on his bald pate and silvering the white hair that defined it. The young nurse, clinging desperately to her professional composure (it was her first death), watched the patient from the other side of the bed. Once, for an instant, she raised her eyes to Dru-

silla's in a grieved wondering stare. Her pale plump face had the grave innocence of an Italian Madonna: in her nurse's uniform she looked like a child dressed up. Sunlight came into the room from sky and river. The day was alive and unclouded, quiet and busy. Now and again from the pavement under the window came suddenly the sound of passing feet and passing voices. These had an odd immediacy, like the intrusion into the mind of something long forgotten: they reminded one of the world beyond, cheerfully intent on its own affairs. But as quickly as they came, these rumours from the street, they passed again, to be swallowed up in the silence of this room: a silence that was like a white sheet upon which was scrawled the ticking of the clock, tick-tack tick-tack, the singing in the ears, and the rasping rhythm of a piece of human mechanism in process of running down. Drusilla looked with anguish and anger at the parcel of alien flesh in which, somewhere, somehow, her mother still lived. Was she eager to be gone? Or was she fighting for tenure of this clay? For pity's sake Drusilla said Go, but her will set itself passionately against the fact of death. Her impotence to help was an intolerable burden. She was condemned to stand and stare, a mute witness, while the anonymous malice of the universe, with shrewd unhurrying fingers, pushed and prodded at the body on the bed, sending its last breath whistling (like steam from a kettle) through dilated nostrils and sagging mouth.

A hand on hers made Drusilla look up. "No pain," said Dr Hewish. "Quite unconscious."

She gripped the hand tightly. Tears rolled out of her eyes.

"Come along," he said. "We'll go downstairs, my dear." He looked across at the young nurse, who, with a hypo-

dermic syringe in her hand, had pulled down the coverlet and was baring the patient's forearm. "I don't think so, nurse, do you?"

She did not speak, but a quick movement in her eyes said "No?"

He shook his head. "It can do no good."

He drew Drusilla out of the room, patting her hand lightly and quickly, with absent-minded affection, and led her downstairs. "She's a good girl, that," he remarked. "She knows her drill, and does it. But I never think it's worth while to keep the heart going for those few minutes longer, though of course it's not my patient this time." After a moment of thoughtful silence he added, as if to himself: "But I know Pontifex would agree with me."

For a fraction of a second Drusilla was startled, by his air of calm, out of her sick dream. She glanced at him curiously, the dry precise mild little man, dark-eyed, round-faced, bushy-browed, with small tufts of unshaven brown beard growing oddly, as if stuck there by chance, at the sides of his cheekbone. He seemed at once ancient and babyish and not quite human, and as though insulated by pure intelligence from the vibration of suffering. She didn't know whether to envy him his philosophy or despise him for it.

"Is it quite hopeless?" she managed to ask.

"Quite, quite!" For the first time in her knowledge of him he spoke sharply, unlike himself. He gave her a brief smile, as if in apology, and urging her into a chair stood looking down at her with wide speculating eyes. "We mustn't hope any more, there's a good girl." He went on speaking at intervals, in a soft reflective voice. "We've done all we could. I've the greatest respect for Pontifex. Things

have taken their inevitable course. . . ."

What else he said Drusilla did not listen to. With soundless imperceptible uncoupling, smoother than thought, she became detached from the time that contained her, and the noise of her stepfather's speaking ran trickling over the surface of her inattention. Everything she saw and heard was unspeakably vivid to her sense, vivid and brittle and glazed with the quality of a dream; but whatever meaning it might have held for her was powerless to keep pace with the vast journeyings of her mind. This was the music-room; that was the river. This was the music-room in which the child Drusilla had sat submissive yet invincible at the feet of Sophia Minty, and in which, a lifetime later, the young woman that child became had enchanted and devastated the heart of her love-greedy Cousin Adrian. And that was the river which during twenty significant years had flowed shining among her thoughts, to carry its continuing rhythm into the devious ways of her oblivion. She was now here, now there, poised precariously, for an instant only, on some point of past time. Every moment was cut off from its neighbour; every moment was a lifetime, insulated and unmeaning.

She heard without interest a tap at the door and looked up to see a young girl in nurse's uniform standing in the doorway. She saw a look of intelligence pass between the nurse and the doctor, and knew, with sudden surprise, that her mother was dead. She knew, and her mind refused the knowledge.

"Yes," breathed the nurse, inclining her head.

He nodded blandly, as if with satisfaction in the orderly sequence of cause and effect. "I'll be with you presently, nurse." The young woman went out of the room, shutting



the door noiselessly behind her.

Left alone with Drusilla, the doctor peered at her thoughtfully over his spectacles.

She came blindly towards him. "It's not possible," she said, with breaking voice.

"Come, come," said Dr Hewish. He put an arm round her shoulders. Drusilla was ten years old: a schoolgirl, gulping back her grief. She leaned against his sturdy stocky figure, put her arms about him, and quietly wept. "Ah, you're crying," he said. "Nature's own relief. Very proper." His voice changed to a squeak. "I almost wish I could cry too."

Suddenly aware of his weight dragging on her, she swayed a little, retained her balance with difficulty, and receiving his limpness into her strong arms half-carried him to a chair, where, with the hot tears already dry and stiff on her cheeks, she quickly unfastened his collar and urged his head forward till it rested between his knees.

He came to himself, forlorn and puzzled.

"Darling, how you frightened me!"

"Thank you, my dear." He smiled apology.

"Will you be all right while I fetch you some brandy?"

Sitting back in the chair he murmured assent, and having taken a sip of brandy he remarked: "You're a true doctor's daughter, Drusilla."

She dropped a light kiss on his forehead. "And I've got a very nice father. Better?"

"Splendid, splendid. Just for the moment," he explained. "I didn't feel quite the thing." He seemed mildly surprised by his misbehaviour. Presently he asked: "You wired to Philip, didn't you?"

"I telephoned, first thing this morning. He wasn't there, but they took a message."

"Well, well. I'll run upstairs in a moment or two. Meanwhile . . ."

Meanwhile he must stay where he was and rest, said Drusilla firmly. And to keep him with her she began talking of what letters and telegrams they must send.

"There aren't so many, really. Sophia and Adrian. Uncle Wat. Uncle Boyd. The Stairey sisters—"

"No, no," said Dr Hewish. "Let them get it from the paper. We'll only bother about real friends."

"If you mean *The Times*," objected Drusilla, "I don't suppose they read it, do you?"

The doctor made a grimace which in other circumstances would have been comical. "So much the better! She never liked them, you know, after their silliness about your going on the stage."

Drusilla sighed. The pencil slipped from her fingers. Abandoning the attempt to distract herself from the dreadful fact upstairs, she stared mournfully out of the window and offered no further resistance to the rising tide of her memories. On that tide she was carried back and back into childhood, to live through, once again, the moments thrown up by the caprice of recollection; but now her maturity too was in attendance, and watchful. All that she had ever been she still in some sense was: yet, with the creative touch of experience incessantly at work upon her, removing this and modifying that, and with her centre of gravity, her time-point, in perpetual uniform motion, she shed a personality and acquired a new one at every beat of her pulse. Her life of the last ten years, her friendships and con-

tacts and the practice of her art, had released her from the bondage of inexpressiveness and endowed her with an expansiveness of manner which, though not itself histrionic, was in part the effect of her artistic discipline; but in moments of distress, if it were but deep enough, her limbs were shackled as of old, and, in Aeschylean phrase, an ox trod on her tongue. She picked the pencil out of her lap and wrote on a pad of letter-paper: Boyd Stanley, 69 Mt Pleasant Avenue, Cheltenham. Mother passed away this morning. Writing. Drusilla. Having written these words she stared at them in a kind of disgust for a moment or two: then crossed through the offending customary euphemism, and put *died* in its place. Passed away? she thought. But where to? What's left isn't Mother, but is there anything else, anywhere?

"Ah, here is Philip, I think," said Dr Hewish, helping himself out of his chair. "I shall go upstairs, my dear."

She longed to see Philip and she longed not to see him. The common grief would bring them nearer together than they had ever been since early childhood; but she was emotionally spent and had no wish to "mingle her tears with his". The Philip in her mind was the schoolboy, the little brother; and so real was this dream that she experienced a shock of surprise when a man in his thirties came silently into the room and held out his hands to her. This Philip, whom she had seen so often and so recently, was for a moment more strange to her than was that other Philip twenty years away; but for a moment only, for almost at once, as she took his hands and met his troubled look (a look which, after the first encounter, shyly, with the shyness of bereavement, avoided her), she became vividly aware of the child still contained in him.

It was not until the afternoon that brother and sister were able to escape for a while from the oppression in the house. At luncheon Drusilla thought how strange it was, how disloyal, to be sitting at table and eating, with Mother lying dead upstairs. All rational behaviour seemed disloyalty, and one's sense of guilt was sharpened, almost to the point of blushing shame, by the recognition of something in oneself that not only consented, cravenly, to go on living, but positively and eagerly leapt at the chance, embraced the comforting precarious fact, and whispered, inside itself, secretly complacent: But *I'm* still alive. Glancing almost furtively across the table at her brother, at her stepfather, she wondered if they too were so base as to know, in the midst of their misery, this same guilty satisfaction. In the afternoon she and Philip went for a walk along the towpath, and talked desultorily, of the war, and of themselves. Philip was not very happy in his profession. He was already tired of being a junior barrister, and saw no prospect of early advancement. The law, with its wisdom and blindness, its majestic intentions and its insane worship of the letter, both attracted and repelled him.

"But, what's more to the point," he remarked, "it doesn't offer enough present scope to my vanity."

"Are you so anxious to shine?" asked Drusilla.

"Shine? Well, yes. But not necessarily in the sight of man. No, nor woman either, as your friend Hamlet says. It's myself I must satisfy. That self of mine, an arrogant devil and very ready to be censorious, requires to be satisfied that I am being a credit to him. And I can only be that by making full use of my powers. And not only of the powers he and I are actually endowed with, but also of others which the poor proud gentleman only imagines us

to possess. You see the difficulty?"

"Yes," said Drusilla. She gave him a rueful, half-amused, indulgent look.

"And a further trouble," Philip went on, "is that the fellow thinks the world should be ours to command—without, you understand, any tedious manœuvring on our part."

"You mean you'd like to be a judge without the bother of working for it," said Drusilla, with sisterly candour.

"A judge, if you like," admitted Philip. "But no ordinary judge, I assure you. I'm afraid I should insist on making the laws as well as administering them. It's funny, I've never supposed myself to be an ambitious man, yet it looks as though nothing short of godhead will satisfy me."

Drusilla smiled wanly. "And have you any immediate prospect of *that* promotion, darling?" She was a little weary of his well-meant resolute cheerfulness. It was idle to pretend that one could think or talk of anything but death: nothing else was real.

"I suppose that's why I'm writing a novel," said Philip. He had perceived her weariness in the very moment of its birth, but his manner did not betray the fact. "The other day I was defending a woman charged with procuring an abortion. She was forty-seven, married, and the mother of grown-up children who thought the world of her. Hard-working, uncomplaining, honest, a thoroughly decent soul. To her comes a girl of twenty, a fifteen-bob a week typist. The kind who would be called a "pretty" typist if she were found murdered. She comes to my client and says: Oh Mrs So-and-So, I'm in a bit of trouble. Whatever shall I do-oo? If only you could put it right for me I should be ever so grateful, ever so! I won't have the baby, not if I have to

drown myself I won't. So my excellent client, being a kind-hearted woman, does what she can. And, being a poor woman, she allows the Bit of Trouble to pay her her out-of-pocket expenses. Finally the Bit of Trouble is bundled off to a hospital, where she proceeds to have as nice a little miscarriage as you could wish for, and nobody a penny the worse. But perhaps I'm shocking you?"

"Don't flatter yourself, my poor little Philip. I hope you got her off?"

"Well, it was obvious that the police had got at the facts, and there was no disputing them. So the only thing for her to do was to plead guilty and throw herself on the mercy of the Court. We were all sorry for her. Counsel for the Crown made what was virtually a speech for the Defence, and by the way the police witnesses spoke of her you might have thought they were recommending the poor woman for a Civil List pension. When they'd finished there wasn't much left for me to say."

Drusilla glowed. "Isn't that splendid! It's nice to think that there's some human sense and kindness even in our courts of justice."

"Yes, isn't it?" agreed Philip blandly. "She got eighteen months."

"What!"

"Technical breach of the law. Eighteen months. You're surprised? I wasn't. The old gentleman on the bench is a man who doesn't like sex. Thinks it a vicious arrangement, introduced into the world behind God's back. Thinks also that as pregnancy is the divine punishment of female frailty, so fear of pregnancy is the only deterrent and must be jealously preserved. Logical enough. He's suffered from sex secretly all his life and so never loses a chance of regis-

tering his disapproval. The amusing thing is he thought he was being exceptionally lenient."

"You find that amusing, do you?"

"Before pronouncing sentence," said Philip, "he assured the prisoner that she was greatly indebted to her learned counsel. The implication being, I suppose, that but for my overpowering eloquence he would have had her whipped at the cart's tail through the streets of London. Yes, my dear Drusilla, I *do* find that rather amusing, since you ask me. That's what makes me think I ought to find something else to do."

Drusilla did not answer. She was wanting to ask him whether he had any belief in a life after death, but the moment seemed inopportune.

"Not that one needs to look far," said Philip, "now there's this war to be won."

"War's not your affair," said Drusilla quickly. "And it'll all be over in six months."

"This particular war looks like being everybody's affair before it's over. And it won't be over in six months either. I shall be in it sooner or later. Not because I want to be, but because I can't indefinitely resist England Expects and the Brave Little Belgium blarney."

"It's not that," said Drusilla. "Men are being killed out there, and that makes you ashamed, so that you want to go and be killed too, and lose your shame." Philip stared, surprised by her penetration. "I know, I know," she continued, meeting his look. "That was exactly how I felt this morning, when they told me about Mother. I felt it was mean of me to be still alive."

After walking a few yards in silence Philip said: "Perhaps she herself is still alive."

"I've been wondering about that," answered Drusilla. "One can't think of her as *not* alive."

That tells us something about ourselves, he commented, but nothing about the dead. But he did not speak this thought. They talked for a while about their mother, reminding each other of this and that, running back into the past together and returning, ruefully, to the blank wall of the present, the bitter fact of loss.

By the time they got back to the house, which now they shrank from entering, the conversation had reverted to the war, the war that was in everybody's mouth.

"It's only just begun," said Philip. "I believe the Germans can't win now. They've lost their chance. But everyone will have to take a hand."

Drusilla's heart contracted with sudden foreboding. Notwithstanding her emotional exhaustion, there was still room in her for fear.

"What do you mean, Phil? Do you mean—everyone?"

Everyone, for the moment, had a face that she knew, and perhaps loved.

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## LOVERS IN DARKNESS

THE attraction of soldiering varies inversely with the accuracy and honesty of one's vision of it. The deceived and the self-deceived, the credulous and the romantic, high-spirited young men bored stiff with sitting on office stools,



impulsive young men inflamed with pity and anger, emotionally starved young men eager to spend themselves in the service of a great cause, the vigorous and wilful in search of scope for their vigour, and the frustrated and ineffectual in search of release from their frustrations: these will run to the colours at the sound of the first trumpet. Neither Philip Moore nor Robert Cordwainer finds a fixed place among these categories, though each, perhaps, in a unique and shifting pattern, contained many of their defining elements. For Robert, as for most of his generation, the notion of being a soldier had the lure of the utterly unexpected. But for him it had the additional lure of being on the face of it impossible. It was not merely that participation in a war formed no part of the life-plan he had so deliberately made for himself: as much could be said for most other men of a planning turn of mind. It was rather that the whole bias of his life seemed to put it beyond possibility that he should shift his centre of gravity from thought to action, from solitary scholarship to mechanical subordination, from the middle ages, so ghostly and luminous, to the twentieth century, harsh, actual, ugly. Yet he was vaguely ashamed of being a sedentary creature, physically undisciplined, unenterprising, and (he plausibly suspected) uncourageous. He always felt unhappy when games were mentioned, and as quickly as possible would turn the conversation, so that he need not be obliged to confess himself a stranger to those high athletic mysteries, unversed in what his friend Allchurch called "Cricketianity, the religion of all English gentlemen". Robert enjoyed the pleasantries, but his enjoyment was not so carefree as that of its author, who, being himself a passable performer, could afford to laugh where Robert, who had never been exhorted to play

the game, to face the bowling, to keep a straight bat, and to take his licking like a man, could not. He was very conscious of not belonging to that tradition and of being unable to think of human existence entirely in terms of sport. He did not precisely wish to belong to it, or to re-model himself on the clean-limbed young Englishman, full of team-spirit, wholesome jollity, reverence for the right things, and laconic sentimentality about dogs. But he did wish—it was the sudden flowering of a long-forgotten seed—to shed the slough of physical torpor, whether it was of indolence or choice, and prove himself effective in action. So drastic a breach of habit as the war offered him would cleanse the inward parts, he felt, and endue him with a touch of that gallantry of spirit, that high courage and stoical gaiety, of which Drusilla must surely have perceived and deplored his lack. With a prophetic eye he saw gallant young subalterns crowding to burn their fingers at her beauty. Brilliantly inarticulate they would offer their humble service, they careless and brave and full of gruff jokes, she tender and smiling and holding back her tears. They would say good bye and kiss her hand and die for her in battle and break her heart. I can't compete with that kind of caper, said Robert to himself: nevertheless it was this vision among other things, the pressure of mass opinion, the newspapers and the posters, the stir of new life, the challenge of danger, the khaki and the military bands, the eager death-delighted excitement of the women, the fear of being afraid, and a reluctant sense of duty, it was this among these other things that impelled him to join the army and to appear before Drusilla unexpectedly, dramatically, in his uniform.

She arrived home one evening to find a young man in the

uniform of a private soldier waiting in her flat.

"Robert!" she exclaimed. "So you've done it! I hoped you wouldn't."

"Did you?" he said huskily.

"Yes. I meant to write and say so."

Her words made him slightly selfconscious. They gave him, too, a moment's bitterness. If only she *had* asked him not to enlist! If she had made a personal point of it, urged it with desperate urgency, and put such compulsion on him as to weaken his resolve while yet placating his conscience! He had not enjoyed his few days as a recruit. He perceived, as of old, the more than carnal beauty of this woman, but in this first moment of reunion, with all the doubts and self-torturings of separation still lingering, he was too sickly aware of himself to be able to taste her full enchantment in one sip.

"Come and let me look at you," she said.

She led him to the window, so that the light could fall on him. The action was friendly, sisterly, an instinctive device to gain time. This was their first meeting since the day he had declared his love for her, in this very room. The shared memory of that afternoon was both a bond and an embarrassment between them. Those letters too, those copious intimate letters—it was difficult to believe that so much of kindness, of disputation, of self-revealing, could have passed between this young man and herself. For after all he was a stranger: she did not know him. The first sight of him as a soldier, with recognition sharpened by difference, had been exciting, vitalizing, like the sight of winter's first snow. But now, in a moment, she had accepted that strangeness and was used to it, and in that degree the young man Robert Cordwainer suffered a diminution of reality. They

had met in spirit and in absence; they had thought of each other much, and identified the dream with the person; and now, confronted, they were confounded. Diffidence stood between them, each being shy of the other's physical presence, actuality, objectivity.

"I meant to ask you not to," she repeated. "But I was afraid it might put the idea into your head."

He gave a wry smile. "Well, it's done now."

"Yes," she said soberly.

She sensed his momentary sullen anger, knew herself the object of it, and was oddly touched and stirred.

They stood hovering, too little at ease to sit down and begin talking. His sullenness passed instantly, but constraint lingered, and it distressed her to feel this distance between them, this palpable this almost solid space. She did not know what she wanted, of herself or of him; but she wanted something other than this. There began an ache in her mind, in her heart, in the centre of her being, and, frightened by it, shying away from it, she began asking questions.

"You didn't think of taking a commission?"

He scowled at the carpet. "That'll come later, I suppose. Most of the men in my crush will become officers in time." He looked up, grinning sheepishly. "You see I've got the jargon already. I'm in a crush. Or, if you like, a mob. Anything but a regiment."

"How long can you stay?" she asked.

"Stay?"

"Stay here, with me?"

He looked at his wrist-watch. "I've got half-an-hour."

"Oh, is that all!" There was desolation in her tone. "Had you been waiting long when I came?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter. I'm never let off the chain for long." He came nearer to her. "Drusilla!"

"Yes?"

He was silent for a while, and then said: "That's just it. I've nothing to say now."

They stared at each other with miserable eyes. Drusilla contrived a ghostly smile.

"What a shame!" She felt nervous and unhappy.

"I've wanted so much to see you," he said, with careful understatement. "And now that I'm here I feel it's all so hopeless."

"Hopeless?"

"Hopeless to say anything. Hopeless to say it all again, when you know it, and aren't interested."

"It's stupid to say I'm not interested," she said warmly. "And unfair too. One of us has got to be sensible: that's how it is."

She was speaking to a brief that was out of date. She half-knew it to be so, but he did not, and the silence that followed her words assumed the rigidity of deadlock. Both he and she were strung up to a point of tension that left thought suspended, imagination immobile, volition divided against itself. The moment swelled with the agony of inaction; swelled and could not break.

When silence could no longer be borne Drusilla heard herself say: "I think you'd better kiss me, Robert—if you would like to." She knew, then, that that was what she wanted, and to that desire she moved with mournful steps, as to a tragic destiny. She extended a hand to Robert, and at his touch she felt the heart turn over in her breast.

TOM AND CLARA:  
PARENTHESIS CONTINUED

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IN THE evening of that June day, ten years before Robert's encounter with Drusilla, Tom Cordwainer and the surprising Clara, with Polly the nag's benevolent co-operation, had put thirty miles between themselves and the railway station of Fallow Green in whose neighbourhood they had first seen each other. Seen each other and found each other: for that was how the affair now stood in Tom's mind. The brilliant day, heavy with the scents of summer yet with every new-minted minute sparkling on the tongue, was drawing serenely to its end. There had been some desultory talk between them, and many silences, including those empty silences, those tracts of what passes for dullness, which can break up a shared day into many days, each dawning with its own freshness and laden with its reminiscence of yesterday.

"What'll your dad say to this, I wonder?"

"He'll not know. He thinks I'm in London. And I reckon he'd not bother if he did."

"How's that?" asked Tom.

She stared away from him, at the passing fields. "I know when I'm not wanted."

"Ah!" He did not pursue the subject, asked no more

questions. It was no affair of his, and the less he knew of it the better he was pleased.

"What about your wife?" said Clara presently.

He gave her an uneasy sidelong grin. "Who said I'd got a wife?"

She smiled, with friendly grimness. "You're the sort that has. You haven't lived your time without marrying. *I* know."

He laughed, only half-vexed. "You know a lot, simmingly. How old d'ye think I am, then?"

"Touchy, aren't you?" she said. Her amused glance made him feel a trifle foolish, but the sensation wasn't altogether unpleasant. "I never said you was old, did I?"

"Well, I'm not a boy," he conceded ruefully.

"No," said Clara. "You're not that. Else I shouldn't be here."

"What d' ye mean?" The eager question slipped out before he could control it.

"Boys," said Clara, "you can't trust them. That's what."

He was both flattered and disappointed by this answer. "Well, I expect you know all about it," he remarked meaningly.

Ignoring that challenge she brought him back to the point. "Aren't you going to tell me about your wife?"

"Oh, *she's* all right," said Tom. "Don't you worry. Good as gold she is."

"I daresay." After a longish silence she amplified this saying. "What about you getting back home?"

"Nothing about it," said Tom firmly. "I'm not expected. See?"

"Honest?"

She looked at him steadily, and he met the look with a defiance bordering on anger.

"Look here, my girl. There's some I'd lie to, make no mistake. But not you. See?"

She left it at that. And still their relationship remained undefined and perhaps undecided. In those early days of the century, thirty miles was a long step, and from noon onwards Tom and Clara were in country that they knew only by report. In one of the many villages they passed through, Tom, leaving Clara and the waggon at a discreet distance along the road, bought food and drink, which they presently shared, picnic fashion, sitting under a hedge. What did she mean by this carefree comfortable behaviour?—and what did she expect? A younger Tom Cordwainer would have laughed at the question, or never have asked it; would have set a brisk pace to the friendship and pushed matters quickly to their crude logical conclusion, yes or no. It was a tribute far more eloquent than in speech he could ever have been capable of, that being so powerfully attracted he yet made no effort, during many hours of companionship, to diminish the invisible distance between them. Tribute to some quality in her that provoked him to a sense not only of caution, though perhaps he saw it as only that, nor yet of virtue, a category that didn't interest him, but of something deeper and more complex than either. When the sun went down, and dusk began to enclose him with Clara in a new kind of quietness, he was surprised to find his anticipations still tentative, still responsive to a check, a doubt, a misgiving. It was unlike him to be diffident with a handsome wench, and he wondered what had come over him. He was surprised too, whenever he spared a glance for it, by the happy conjunction of accidents that had brought him and the young woman thus far. They were most aptly equipped for adventure. The weather was



warm and likely to remain so; and, if it turned to rain, there was the hooded waggon, as dry and snug as you please. Tom had a sovereign or two in his purse, and Clara had a tin trunk containing all her personal possessions. Things couldn't have fallen out better, and the conclusion to which they pointed was obvious. Yet Tom was aware of a trembling within him. His heart began pumping like a traction engine whenever his thoughts approached unknown territory, and his voice went curiously dry. The silences, now, seemed to him full of meaning; but he couldn't for the life of him be sure of what was going on in the mind of this strange young woman, so cool, so friendly, so independent and elusive.

As the light waned Tom's wonder grew. Dusk was like a hand touching him. At nightfall, with the last glimmer of day gone, and the new moon rising, he turned Polly abruptly to the left and brought her to a standstill on a broad strip of common pasturage, and in the shadow of a belt of dark trees that stood some twenty yards away from the road. The sudden muffling of the wheels' noise as they reached the turf had brought the night nearer, a hovering presence. And now, for a moment, the silence was curiously personal.

Tom jumped down and went to Polly's head, talking to her in a cheerful undertone. He was nervous, and annoyed with himself for being so, and ready, moreover, to be annoyed with Clara for being the occasion of his odd discomfiture. Preoccupied with a problem so unusual that he couldn't even have stated it, he forgot her for a moment, and presently awoke with some surprise to the fact that she too had jumped down from the cart and was unharnessing the nag with practised fingers.

He moved to Polly's other flank, and they spoke to each other across that broad odorous back.

"You ever slept in a waggon before, have you?" he asked.

"No."

In the darkness her voice was soft and clear and cold. It told him nothing.

"You'll find it pretty snug. Plenty of straw and sacking."

She offered no remark, and it was not until Polly was unharnessed and watered and safely tethered for the night that she asked him: "Where did *you* think of sleeping?"

His heart leaped over the moon: the young moon that was like an apple-paring tossed into the dark sky by just such a hand as hers.

"Me?" he said, with hypocritical innocence. "Oh, there's hedges and haystacks. I'll manage." Ears straining for her answer he let down the cart's tail and climbed in at the back. The nearest hedge and the nearest haystack were half a mile away, and he had not the least intention of going so far. She stood outside, on the purple turf, but he could not discern the expression on her face. He handed out a piece of sacking. "Better give it a shake. It'll be dusty I daresay."

Having received the sacking she stood motionless, trailing it in her hand. He jumped down and stood beside her, saying to himself: What next? She must think me a green-horn, by cripes she must! Now, suddenly, he was somehow sure of her, she stood so still, so near, so silent. Yet even now . . . He put out a hand and touched her.

"Well?" said he.

"Well?" she said, incredibly neutral.

Half-daunted, he made a selfconscious attempt at banter. "Suppose I was to kiss you?" he asked, summoning all the

impudence he could find. A blundering way of going about it, he thought the next instant.

"Please yourself," she said coolly. "It's no treat to me."

He remembered what she had said about boys. You can't trust boys. He remembered she had implied that he was no longer young. He cursed himself for having started on this gentlemanly tack, when treat 'em rough was what they understood, and what they liked. But his pride was stronger than his lust. Not the man he had been.

"If that's how it is I'd better say good night," he said, with a coolness matching her own. "Sleep easy, Miss Jones."

He turned to go.

"We've had a nice day, haven't we?" she said.

It sounded as though she was laughing at him. He turned back. "We have, that."

She made the slightest of movements towards him and he snatched her greedily into his arms.

"Oh get along with you!" she said. "We've all night for that." Her voice was dark and warm with amusement, but the kiss she returned him told another tale. "You and your old haystacks," she said scornfully.

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## NEWS FOR DR HEWISH

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Soon after his wife's death Dr Hewish sold his practice at Kewbury Strand and got into military uniform. He was now sixty-two, but he still had reason to consider himself

a no more than middle-aged man. To Drusilla he had seemed old twenty years ago, but now, her notion of oldness being necessarily different from that of a girl of fifteen, she no longer thought of him so: to her, as to himself, he was neither old nor young but of a neutral age. Knowing in his bones, however, that he was in danger of being aged by his bereavement, and being stubbornly tenacious of the vigour that remained to him, he plunged into war service in search of distraction, as well as because it seemed the obvious thing to do. With his wife gone, the house at Kewbury Strand held nothing but poignant reminders for him, and the routine of a suburban general practitioner afforded no relief from the ever-present sense of loss. Marriage, entered upon with the minimum of illusion and in his sober maturity, had yielded him a satisfaction far in excess of the modest comfort he had asked of it. Drusilla's mother in her middle thirties had been a ripe and bountiful creature, seductively young. The warmth of heart and nature by whose genial power she had contrived to hatch a doting husband from the egg of confirmed bachelordom was something that afforded the fledgeling perpetual wonder and happiness; and this surprised gratitude survived its occasion. Once away from the house, and from the too personal presence of the ghost that haunted it, he was able to remember her with more impunity, and to sun himself, with a regret softened by resignation, in the warm light of those memories.

When he first mooted the question of offering his services to the army he was told to report to the War Office. Here he was received with brisk contempt, kept waiting three quarters of an hour in one room and twenty-five minutes in another, and finally admitted to the presence

of a red-faced bull-necked gentleman in the uniform of a staff officer. Having given his visitor a resentful stare, this personage resumed his writing. He wrote for five minutes, with Dr Hewish standing patiently in front of him, hat in hand. Then he looked up.

"Well?"

Dr Hewish explained his business.

Authority glared at him. "Take your trousers down!" Authority went on writing.

Instead of taking his trousers down Dr Hewish pursed his lips thoughtfully, peered at the patient over his spectacles, and began making a silent diagnosis. Incipient arteriosclerosis. Eats too much. Drinks too much. Only way to save his life would be to reduce him to the ranks, poor fellow.

"Didn't you hear what the Major said?" whispered someone at his side, in a shocked undertone.

At this the officer looked up again. At the sight of insubordination his eyes widened and his mouth opened.

"Just a moment," said Dr Hewish soothingly. "I'm afraid I haven't made myself clear to you." It was essential not to excite the patient: that would be fatal. In his dry kindly voice the doctor enumerated his qualifications. Thirty-six years' general experience. Five years as house-surgeon here, fifteen as visiting surgeon there. "And I've done a little monograph or two on—"

"Any specialized skill?"

"Nothing perhaps quite to the point."

"That's for me to judge. Who the devil do you think you are, sir?"

Dr Hewish smiled. "I have a rather special knowledge of obstetrics, Major. But I imagine that pregnancy doesn't

often occur among your men?"

After an apoplectic silence the Major announced coldly: "We've no use for humorists here, Dr Whatever-your-name is."

With a sigh and a smile the doctor showed himself out. At the nearest post-office he wrote a note to Sir Somebody Somebody, an expedient to which he should have resorted earlier, and within three weeks was on his way to a Base Depot in France. After brief service abroad he was transferred to the command of a hospital in the south of England. Here he was within comparatively easy reach of London, where he was sometimes able to spend an hour or two with Drusilla, who, though she could never hope to be all that her mother was, had unquestionably grown into a handsome wench and with enough likeness to that incomparable woman to make him glad to be mistaken for her father in the restaurants and concert-halls where they were seen together.

At their first encounter after his return from France, Drusilla confided to him a piece of news. They sat facing each other, across a table set for two, in a rather dingy and distinguished restaurant. Outwardly serene but inwardly tremulous, Drusilla braced herself to meet an awkward moment. She had a vivid uncomfortable sense of the darkness that had fallen on London. In some obscure fashion she felt herself personally humiliated by that darkness, the necessary obvious expedient of disallowing lights, curtaining windows. She sat consciously environed by a network of sad comfortless streets and by the desolate country and dark seas beyond: streets patrolled by policemen diligent to reprove careless householders; country lying naked and uneasy in its sleep, expectant of outrage; seas crawling with

evil. This suppression of light was a true symbol of the horror now abroad in the world, a blasphemous countermand of the first word of creation. Man had said "Let there be darkness", and for Drusilla, at this moment, all human comfort was contracted within the narrow compass of light cast by the shaded lamp on this dining-table. It was with an effort of will that she brought her mind back to the business in hand.

"There's something I think I ought to tell you, darling."

The preliminaries were over, the meal ordered, the sherry in process of drinking. The sound of distant booming fell upon the ear; but whether in imagination or in fact was difficult to tell. On the other side of the English Channel the bodies of men were being elaborately mutilated. They were dismembered; their mouths were stoppd with mud; they nourished the rats. In ten thousand temples the light of the spirit was put out. In this war, as in every other, the rats were winning.

"They do quite a nice dry sherry here," remarked her stepfather. "Well, what is it, my dear?"

"It falls into two parts," said Drusilla, seeking refuge in selfconscious humour. "The first is, I'm married."

He looked at her in question, mildly surprised. "Dear, dear! What a mysterious young woman!"

"Sorry, darling."

"Sorry you're married? I hope not." A silence fell between them. Presently he said: "Why hasn't one heard about this before, I wonder?"

Drusilla's eyes had a faraway look. She was listening. "Is that anti-aircraft guns we can hear?" She did not wait for an answer. "There *are* reasons why I didn't tell you. But I'm not sure now that they're very good ones."

He radiated benevolence upon her. "Skip the reasons, my dear child, and come to the young man. Where have you hidden him?"

"It happened four months ago, when you were in France," said Drusilla. "That's one reason, I suppose. He's out there, in the trenches. We were married just before he went."

"I see." The doctor fingered his wine-glass.

"He was at Cambridge when the war began. Fellow of his college, and a brilliant scholar." She paused, hesitating at a check in her thoughts. "And he's very very young," she suddenly said.

"How young?" asked her stepfather.

"Much younger than I am. About twenty-five."

Dr Hewish made an enigmatic grimace. "Well, my dear, you know your own business best. I hope you'll both be very happy."

She smiled satirically. "But you don't think there's much chance of it. I don't blame you, darling. You're shocked."

But his urbanity was imperturbable. "Not shocked. I'm too old to be shocked. Only a little surprised. May one ask, are you in love with your husband?"

She lowered her glance. "Yes. Unbearably." After a pause she said: "We've had the most heavenly happiness. The most cruel happiness."

"I'm glad," said the doctor. "Nothing can take that away from you."

He had read her own thought and she looked at him gratefully. "Yes, you do believe that, don't you?" she said, thinking of her mother. The sound of artillery had come nearer, and the warning siren was heard in the street. "There seems to be a raid," she remarked, with a slight



shrug, as of disgust.

"Yes," he said. "Here comes the soup, I think."

"It wasn't a case of losing one's head," Drusilla said presently. "I said No a hundred times."

"Did you?" He unfolded his napkin. "Shall we eat this?" Obediently she picked up her spoon. "But go on telling me," he said. His own soup was untouched as yet. He still fingered his wine-glass, from which he had taken only a sip.

"I said No to Robert a hundred times. Robert Cordwainer his name is. Look, you're spilling your sherry!"

"What? Am I?" He stared, rather dazedly, at the pool on the tablecloth and put down his glass. "Careless of me."

"But he was terribly persistent," said Drusilla. "And then I fell in love too. But that wasn't only why I married him."

"Wasn't it?"

"I wanted him to be really happy before he . . . went away. As for marriage, that didn't seem very important either way."

"Quite so," said Dr Hewish. Correcting himself with some sign of confusion he asked: "Didn't it? But surely it *is* rather important."

"Marriage," said Drusilla, "and the difference in our ages. In five years or ten years that might have mattered. But not now."

"I don't quite understand you, my dear."

She gave a dry unhappy laugh. "He's a subaltern. He's on the Western Front. There's not much chance of his living to regret being married to me, is there?" Her voice hardened. "He's very likely dead at this moment. While we sit here talking about him," she added, in a kind of anger. Meeting her stepfather's bewildered eyes she was filled with a sudden compunction. "You look awfully tired.

Have you been working too hard?"

He smiled deprecatingly. "Maybe. Never mind that. So your name's Cordwainer now, is it?"

"Yes. How do you like it?"

"It's an uncommon name, isn't it? I've a feeling I've heard it before, but I can't somehow quite place it. I suppose your Robert doesn't come from our part of the world?"

"But yes, he does," she declared triumphantly. "At least from what used to be our part of the world, before you and Mother were married."

"Ah!"

"He was born at Fallow Green. That was quite near us, wasn't it?"

"H'm, yes. No great distance. Well, that explains the mystery. His parents must have called me in at some time or other."

"How extraordinary, isn't it!" The mere possibility of the coincidence restored Drusilla to cheerfulness. "Why, you may even have helped to bring him into the world."

He met the suggestion with a vague smile. "Possibly. Possibly. But it's too long ago. And when do you expect *your* child, my dear?"

She changed colour, but faced him smiling. "How clever of you, darling! January, I think."

"Ah, yes." He looked at her with shrewd affection. "I was wondering when you were going to tell me that."

Her answer was cut short by a deafening crash in the street just outside. The door of the restaurant burst suddenly open, and the building gave a slight shudder. There followed a dead silence, which Dr Hewish at length broke by saying pleasantly: "That was very near, wasn't it? But not quite near enough."

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## PART THREE

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### CATASTROPHE

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19. THE HUSBAND
20. THE WIFE
21. THE CHILDREN
22. EMILY SAYS NOTHING
23. UNHAPPY CHANCE
24. TOM HAS A NOTION
25. FATHER AND DAUGHTER
26. FIRST INVESTIGATOR
27. SECOND INVESTIGATOR
28. MASTER W. H.
29. DOMESTIC CONVERSATIONS
30. DR HEWISH GROWS ANXIOUS
31. THE INQUEST OPENS
32. WITNESS FOR THE DEFENCE
33. A SOUL IN FLIGHT
34. PHILIP TAKES CHARGE



## THE HUSBAND

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ON THE morning of his fortieth birthday he woke with the words *Fifty-three! Fifty-three!* sounding in his mind. Friends who had known him before his marriage, and had seen him at frequent intervals during the seventeen years that had followed it, could observe little outward evidence of the changes that time and experience had wrought in Robert Cordwainer. Time and experience: but, for the individual consciousness, what is time but experience? It was the kind of question that Robert himself was in the habit of throwing out: not indeed in the lecture-rooms, where he was content to teach by the book, but in the more informal atmosphere of his supervision-classes: and not oracularly, with authority, but in the hope of provoking thought, protest, and perhaps even contradiction, in the minds of his too docile pupils. Time, he would suggest, apart from one's experience of time, is an abstraction without content. Time as we know it is a sensation; as we conceive it, a succession. But, divorced from experience, and from ideas derived from experience, it is featureless, unknowable, inconceivable, and, though the unknowable and the inconceivable may exist we cannot know or affirm that it exists. I am arguing in circles, do you say? I am begging

a large question? Thank you, Miss Feathers: I was hoping someone would pull me up.

But, whatever the nature of time and experience, the changes in Robert Cordwainer were little advertised upon his surface. His rather lean face still gave the impression of sombreness, except when animated by speech; his hair was still dark and plentiful, with no suggestion of graying; his movements were quick, neat, decisive, and he carried himself with a somewhat military stiffness. Drusilla herself saw changes that vaguely dismayed her: the thought of them lay uneasily in her heart; but these were changes, not from the Robert she had first known, but from the Robert that she by her love had temporarily made of him. It was not that he was no longer young: it was rather that the youth released in him by marriage had vanished, and that he was now as old as he had ever been—as old, as stiff in his psyche's joints, as when she had first met him and married him and set him free. Marriage had untied some knots in him, but now there were others (of whose tying?) which she had no wit to cope with. She tried to explain them in terms of the war—as the belated harvest of horrors sown in a fresh and fertile mind—but the explanation did not altogether convince her. She did not know that he woke on the morning of his fortieth birthday with the words fifty-three sounding in his mind, for though, years ago, she had half-predicted some such event, she had been careful to forget the prediction, and, being tolerably happy in the possession of her home, her husband, her three children, was spared the discomfort of recognizing its fulfilment. The years of her life now numbered precisely that: fifty-three.

Soon after his return from the war Robert had confessed to her, in a mood of which she refused to perceive the under-

tone of bitterness, that he had overstated his age at that first critical interview in Sloane Street; partly in chivalry, but mainly for his own ends, in order to diminish the distance that divided him from her. That distance, those thirteen years, constituted a burden which his writhing vanity was forced to bear: in his heart he added them to his own years, accounting them time lost, a life un-lived. When he could he averted his eyes from such fancies, and would not admit to himself, either that he had had any choice but to do as he did, or that he wished it undone. If Drusilla, a grey-haired woman, no longer provoked the instantaneous verdict of "beautiful", she nevertheless carried the golden legend of her beauty in her amused eyes, her gentle mouth, the warm tones of her voice, the contours of her now ample person. It was not her fault that she was old and he her husband: the situation (he said, yet sometimes could scarcely believe) was all of his own contriving. Nor was there any dearth of affection between them: if he was sometimes conscious of famine in his soul, it was not for lack of the wholesome and necessary bread of kindness, whether given or received. Together they had mastered the art of being together, learning each other's temperaments, avoiding occasions of conflict, and building up, patiently, unwittingly, a relationship, a habit, a sense (glad or reluctant) of identity, that was of the essence of marriage. But other men had young wives: he was different, a freak. When he saw these others in the pride of their youth—yet men no younger than himself—he winced, and turned the eyes of his mind away, as though from a picture of something that he must for ever be denied. And he could not, in unguarded moments, refrain from wondering what people said about him when he wasn't there to hear. About him, and about



Drusilla, with whom, in the beginning of their love, he had entered the kingdom of heaven. Did they say, as they ought to say, that the presence of that charming and distinguished woman shed lustre on him and his home? Very possibly, for the fact could hardly be denied. And did they add, with a lift of the eyebrows, that it was an odd uncomfortable business when a man married someone nearly old enough to be his mother? Did they? Did they? He would never know.

For the first ten minutes after his waking, on this particular morning, these sick misgivings obsessed him, and with eyes shut fast against the sunlight he lay as if paralysed, body inert, mind undefended. But at last he forced himself to get out of bed, and with the first decisive movement he became conscious of some mental relief. He strode gloomily to his bath, but by the time he emerged from it the gloom had lifted, and the images filling his consciousness with movement and colour were all light and passing, memories of yesterday and expectations of the day now beginning. The trouble was in himself, it was the creature of introspection: when he forgot himself, escaping from himself into action, its power over him dwindled to vanishing point, and hovered there, at call, out of sight. Today would be very much like other days, but not entirely so; for it was a happy feature of this academic life that except by bad management no two successive days needed to be of precisely the same pattern. Two mornings a week he had a lecture to give, and on the three other mornings he conducted supervision-classes. These classes were held in a room at his own college, though the pupils, graded according to seniority, were of various colleges. Today's routine had a special quality of its own in virtue of the fact that he

was to take a class of five young women, members not of the university but of the two women's colleges associated with the university (a distinction jealously preserved in all official documents). Robert was among those who opposed on principle the notion of conceding to women an equal academic status with men. But he could not bear to make himself conspicuous by refusing to accept women as supervisees, and the success of the lamentable experiment had already made inroads on his prejudice. Four of his five were painfully earnest young persons whose idea of acquiring the moral science was to copy his remarks into a notebook and serve them up to him, undisguised and unmodified, in the essays he set them. But the fifth was another story, and Robert, remembering that today he must see her, felt a sudden quickening in his mind.

He was aware of her. Mary Feathers, as soon as he entered the room: of her slight figure, her intent eyes, her silence. She was light without heat, a flame of young cool life. He was aware of her, and, as he took his seat at the head of the table, he was aware, for one blinding instant, of her consciousness leaping to meet his own. Let me not to the marriage of true minds . . . With a perfunctory "Good morning" he placed his portfolio on the table and took from it a bundle of manuscripts. He cleared his throat nervously.

"Quite a good crop of essays this time, gentlemen." He had first so addressed them with mildly sardonic intention. The designation had been accepted as a pleasantry: it survived as a mere habit. "But certain passages, here and there, make me feel that I am listening to myself talking—and, er, talking in my sleep.

He smiled rather painfully on the company, and his

smile was indulgently returned to him by three out of five. Mary Feathers did not smile. Nor did the solemn bespectacled Miss Ringwood. Miss Feathers stared at her own thoughts. Miss Ringwood sat alert, pencil poised, notebook ready: she was waiting to be handed something which the examiners, by good luck, might give her a chance of reproducing in her Tripos papers. Robert went through the essays one by one, making brief comments, and returning each manuscript to its author when he had finished with it, except that to Miss Feathers he said: "May I keep this a day or two? I should like to read it again." So far he had offered no opinion of her performance, but now, as he turned her pages, there began a discussion between them, a discussion that went on and on. The others listened admiringly, but they resisted Mr Cordwainer's efforts to draw them into the conversation, and presently their admiration grew weary: especially that of poor Miss Ringwood, who watched in vain, like a cat at a mousehole, for something that she could get hold of, something about Plato or Aristotle, Kant or Hegel, or a few scraps of heartwarming terminology, of which she had been at pains to learn the meaning, such as causation, percept, sense data, empirical, and the rest. She felt, sadly rather than resentfully, that she wasn't getting her father's money's worth. It was wonderful how Mary, with only a word here and a word there, kept her end up, thought Miss Ringwood; and it may be that Mary herself thought it wonderful, too, for only half her mind was engaged with what Robert was saying.

Robert's watch lay face upwards on the table at his left elbow. When its hands indicated 12.30 he built his books and papers into a neat pile, thrust the pile under his arm, and rose. The five followed his lead. In voices whose colour

varied from silver to bronze they wished him a good morning and filed out of the room. Robert, left alone, sat down again, leaned his elbows on the table, and rested the tragic mask of his face upon the joined hands, the knotted apex of the triangle. And while he sat there, savagely imposing order on his thoughts, the door opened and Mary Feathers came back.

Lifting his head, he directed upon her a look of polite inquiry.

"I left a book here," she said. He watched her from under knitted brows, offering no remark. Having picked up her book she made no pretence of moving away: with the tips of her fingers resting lightly on the table, she stood waiting, in silence, looking at his hands. All that needed saying between them had already been said, an hour ago, without speech. Rigid with resolve, he armed himself against the inevitable moment when she would lift her glance to his, and invite with her eyes the outward confession of what each had already confessed in a look.

She looked at him, with a kind of wonder. He veiled his eyes, denying her; and, after a moment's pause, pushed back his chair and got up.

"That was a very good essay of yours, Miss Feathers," he said.

She looked at him steadily, but did not speak, and her silence inflamed him.

"Are you twenty yet?" he asked abruptly, with an approach to sarcasm.

"I am twenty-two."

He laughed harshly, deriding himself.

"And I'm fifty-three," he said, moving to the door and, with curt ceremony, holding it open for her.

The words uttered themselves without his knowledge or volition, but the change in her face made him recall and examine them. He was startled and confused by what he found.

She came slowly towards him, on her way out. When she was within hand's touch she stopped, to ask: "Why did you say that?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Why not?"

Puzzled as well as hurt, she said, half angry, half pleading: "It was stupid of you, wasn't it?"

Even in this moment he was able to be glad that the falsehood of his statement had been so grossly apparent. But, afraid equally of anger and appeal on her part, knowing in every nerve that either might at any moment precipitate defeat, he went blindly through the doorway, leaving Mary Feathers where she stood.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I must go." He forced himself to add, over his shoulder: "I'll let you have the essay back in a day or two."

His voice sounded in memory like a stranger's voice, and the stone stairs as he descended them rang sharp under his tread.

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## THE WIFE

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THAT same morning had its own special quality for Drusilla too. She woke to find herself alone in the room: Robert

was an uncertain sleeper nowadays and had had a bed made up in his dressing-room, where he could wake and read at all hours without fear of disturbing anyone. The sense of morning solitude, though it was no new thing, gave her a moment's wonder, for her dreams, now drifting beyond reach, had been richly gregarious. It was a moment of serene detachment. The body was quiescent, the spirit free. In this interval between sleep and action the cares and duties of the day did not yet exist for Drusilla. They were a burden she would put on presently, with her clothes: at present she had no thought for them. But the sunlight filtering into the room drew her out of bed. She went to the window and drew the curtains, and stood staring down upon a white-frosted garden. Sprinkling lawns, flower-beds, paths, blanching the roof of the potting-shed, crisply defining the gable of the coach-house, encrusting the bare thin boughs of fruit-trees and the spreading multiform arms of the great beech, this sparkling whiteness, the scattered crumbs of a celestial element, held all the world, it seemed, in a trance of still delight. Drusilla stared, and lost herself in staring. Lost herself, yet found herself too, for there was renewed in her, as though a lamp had been lit, that virgin sense of her own identity which belonged to early childhood, belonged to a long-forgotten anonymous moment in which the intuition of her self, her intimate being, the enclosed boundless beatitude of her consciousness, first dawned in her. She did not recall that moment, but it lived in her again, vibrating in unison with the present, the astonishing expanding sensation of *I am*. It carried her now to the verge of an ultimate liberation. Before Drusilla was, *I am*. Her mind halted at the threshold of this strange thought, and was turned aside by the sound of

Robert's coming out of the bathroom. Nearly breakfast-time: I mustn't dawdle. I wonder if he's had a good night.

Not till breakfast was half over did she remember that it was Robert's birthday. It was his whim to ignore the anniversary; he had no pleasure in it; and Drusilla, though she shamelessly celebrated her own when it occurred, had trained herself to humour him in this matter. She could not, however, forbear giving him an uneasy glance, and toying with the notion of breaking the grim rule. The glance told her that she was shut out of his mind, the door made fast, the windows darkened against her; and with a sigh that had no outward form, and expressed only the most shadowy meaning for herself, she allowed her glance and her thoughts to rest for an instant, with an emotion too light for melancholy, too profound for happiness, on the faces of her children, and then returned to contemplation of the letter from Charles Pomeroy which she had found lying beside her plate. Her children's conversation, the small shrillness of John and Judith and the warmer softer tones of Margaret their elder sister, provided a kaleidoscopic background to the imagined voice of her old friend Charles, garrulous, genial, wheedling. She knew, none better, how flattering it was to receive so long a letter from so busy and bustling a man, a man who though generous enough with his talk when he met you seldom had time or patience to put his hand to a letter. In general he even grudged the trouble of scrawling his signature to three curt sentences of typescript. Yet to her he had written a long letter, and in his own hand. He had been her guest for a night some seven weeks ago, and with his talk of the theatre, his flattery, his mind still bubbling with new plans, he had caused her many a secret twinge of nostalgia. She

had left the stage soon after Robert's release from the army, and had never appeared since, except once, in a charity performance. Charles during his visit had dropped a broad hint; had talked much of a new play on which he had just bought an option; had remarked more than once that he would like her to meet the brilliant young author; and finally, since the fish did not rise, had asked her if she could spare time to glance over the manuscript and give him her opinion of its chances.

"My darling Charles," she said, shaking a finger at him, "you are being very naughty!"

He turned to her with a face of outraged innocence, and Robert, watching the comedy with a polite hospitable smile, felt himself to be a stranger to them both. That's her world, and that's the generation she belongs to, he thought: glancing with surprise at the younger self his memory confronted him with.

"Yes, Charles. You're breaking our compact. You're trying to seduce me from my domestic allegiances."

"Aha!" said Charles Pomeroy. He rubbed his hands together in triumph. "It's your conscience that makes you so touchy. It all comes of hiding your talent in a napkin." Turning to Robert he added, with extravagant gesture: "And what a talent, my dear fellow! What a lovely talent!"

"And the napkin," said Drusilla, glancing at Robert and conjuring a smile from him, "isn't the napkin equally lovely, Charles?"

She herself was in no doubt of it. This home, these children, and Robert: what woman could ask more of life? But that didn't prevent her from giving a wistful glance backwards, at the career into which, now she came to think of it, Charles Pomeroy himself had pitched her. His letter this



morning was crammed with green-room gossip, and with details of the new production; but it refrained from remarking that there was a part in the play to which only one woman in the world could do justice. Drusilla regarded the omission as yet another example of dear Charles's diabolical cunning. The whole document, indeed, was a masterpiece of suggestion, full of unsaid things that were nicely calculated to disturb her peace. Well done though it was, its motive was transparent to Drusilla, for she knew her Charles, and she knew that he did not write long friendly letters for nothing. With a smile she refolded the sheets and put them back into their envelope. She could afford to smile, for, sentimentally excited though she was by the memories that started up in her mind, she was not seriously tempted.

"Come, my dears," she said, glancing up at the clock, "it's nearly a quarter past eight."

The twins, John and Judith, went to schools in Cambridge, travelling there together each morning by train, and returning in time for the family tea at five o'clock. They were twelve years old; Cambridge was three stations away; and the train-journey through flat meadow country, and the possession of season-tickets, gave them a profound satisfaction. They were at different schools, and to meet in the afternoon for the return-journey had never ceased to be pleasantly exciting. The alternative to this plan had been co-education, and though Robert and Drusilla disagreed on the general question they were at one in thinking that it would be as good for the twins to be decisively separated during school hours as it would perhaps have been bad for them to be kept forcibly apart for long periods. Margaret, loving yet aloof, aloof and alone less by reason of her four

years' distance from these two than by their nearness to each other, had an unknown life elsewhere, in the remote world of a young ladies' boarding school. Half the school and more than half the staff having succumbed to an epidemic, the place had been closed, and the uninfected sent home, three weeks before the term's appointed end; so here she was with her family, feeling a little like a visitor (for it was odd being here during the twins' term-time), but gratefully conscious of Drusilla's satisfaction in the possession of her.

Robert was more silent than usual this morning, and the twins' departure for school left a gap that at times threatened the remaining three with self-consciousness. But presently it was time for Robert, too, to leave the house, and, though neither would have confessed it to the other, both the wife and the daughter were conscious of a lightening of the spirits when he was gone. Drusilla paused to contemplate the picture that drifted into her mind, of Robert wheeling his bicycle out of the coach-house, mounting, and riding down the white road which today was flanked on each side with fields almost equally white; then turned with a question to Margaret.

"What are you going to do this morning, darling?"

"I don't know, mother. What are you?"

"I've one or two things to do. A letter to write, and I must have a word with Cook."

"Will you be busy all morning?" asked Margaret, as one taking a polite interest in her hostess.

"Then I must run across to see Jinny Seagrave," said Drusilla, "and find out when the wedding's going to be."

"Fancy Celia getting married!" said Margaret. "It seems funny somehow."

"I don't know why it should seem funny to *you*, dear. To me, yes. But I've known her since she was a baby."

Margaret privately thought that Celia, though nearly twenty, was still rather a baby. But she did not say so. "If we had a telephone, mother, you wouldn't have to go and see Mrs Seagrave, would you?"

Drusilla smiled at the artful simplicity of the remark, recognizing her own tactics. "Darling, that's just the kind of thing I used to say to *my* mother, as though butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. You know your father won't hear of having the telephone."

"Still," said Margaret, "it would save you a lot of running about."

"Yes, and make me grow fatter and fatter," Drusilla retorted with a smile. "You should think more about my figure, darling, and less about my old bones."

"Could we have some music, do you think," said Margaret, "after you've done your jobs?"

"Music in the morning, and me a busy housewife!" cried Drusilla.

But she didn't mean it, and she knew that Margaret knew she didn't mean it, and it was to the music room, an hour or so later, that the maid-servant brought her a telegram that had just been delivered. With this telegram clutched in her hand she sauntered out to the coach-house just as Robert was putting his bicycle away.

His look surprised her. He had a dazed air, as though the news she was about to impart had already reached him.

"Robert, there's a telegram for you. It came half an hour ago. It's about your mother."

His posture stiffened. "Yes?"

"She's very ill. You'll have to go to her."

He took the telegram from her hand and read it.

"I've packed sandwiches for you. Will you try and eat something while I get the car out?"

He looked at her blankly for a moment. Then said: "Have you looked up trains?"

"Yes, they're bad, hopeless. You'll do better by road. But *do* drive carefully, won't you!"

Does it matter? he thought. "Yes, yes. Of course."

"I'd much rather you let *me* drive you," said Drusilla, but without hope of his acquiescence. "I could be ready in three minutes."

Robert had already seated himself at the wheel. He started the engine, put out the clutch. Drusilla thrust her hand in at the window and dropped the packet of sandwiches on to the seat beside him.

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## THE CHILDREN

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NEXT morning, Saturday, brought Drusilla the expected news from Robert, and it was as if a clear cold voice in her heart were saying to her with suave iteration: Happiness? What nonsense! How can you be happy in a world where death is forever breaking in? But she stared this challenge in the face, and smiled upon her children where they sat at table.

"Children, how would you like to go to Claybrook Mere today?"

"Oh do let's!" cried Judith. Glancing covertly at her twin-brother she saw that rare slight smile visit his face, to be succeeded by a look of silence and reserve. She knew by these portents that though he shared her eagerness for the outing he would not encourage himself to take pleasure in the prospect until it should be assured beyond question.

"All of us?" asked Margaret. "You too, mother?" It flashed through her mind that if only Frank Seagrave could be one of the party (but it was only an *if*, it wouldn't happen) there would be someone who knew that she wasn't only a schoolgirl, and then she wouldn't feel quite so family. It was nice to feel family, but sometimes Margaret dreamed of a more glorious destiny. Frank himself had no part in those dreams (how should he have, who had played with her like a brother through years of childhood?), but something in his look helped to provoke them, something that said: You are different, you are Margaret. It was a new look, and he had a new deep voice, a new reserve and quietness, that seemed to go with it.

"Yes, all of us," said Drusilla. "Why not? Perhaps Annie could come too. We could squeeze her in, I expect."

Judith's quick glance drew John's to meet it. He read the message she flashed at him: It's all right, you see!—we're going, John!—why don't you be pleased? But though his eyes answered they did not commit him to the long hazard of hope.

"Claybrook Mere!" breathed Judith happily.

Claybrook Mere was something over ten miles away, and this fact provided some part of its attractiveness. One did not need to go ten miles, or five, to find natural enchantment. That lay close at hand, in nearby meadows. Wherever grass grew or streams flowed, wherever a passing season

made visible her peculiar grace, there the life of nature could be found, delight sensible and satisfying in itself and a rich nourishment for the daydreams of childhood. In this order of experience, to which they gave no conscious thought, John and Judith had found, and would find again, moments of unclouded joy, of timeless thoughtless beatitude, and these moments, an uncounted store of images not consciously retained, lent colour and light, shape and substance, to the ground-stuff of their consciousness. Within ten minutes of their own garden there was a high grass bank running the length of a field and surmounted by a ragged row of trees and bushes: hawthorn, hazel, young beech. On that sunwarmed slope the first primroses appeared, and white violets, and pennywort and wood-sorrel, speedwell and celandine, and wild strawberries small and perfect such as you might find in the garden of a doll's house; but, apart from these heavenly incidents, these miracles born of a conspiracy between earth and sky, by peering close into that world of tall green blades, by hurrying with ants, and small spiders, and bright things without a name, on their busy unknown occasions to and fro, you could see this grass bank as a vast forest innumerable peopled, and could live in that forest for long moments, beautiful and strange. Thought of this place, as he discreetly averted his attention from Claybrook Mere, drifted in and out of John's mind, leaving a brightness in its path; and this brightness became an entity independent of its source and ready to mingle and merge with any other image that might chance to come along, whether Claybrook Mere or another.

Claybrook Mere had once meant a day's expedition with the pony and trap. But the pony had died, the trap had been

sold, and in their place was the car. And now Margaret, standing a little aloof from the family excitement even though she shared it, remembered something that the others had momentarily forgotten.

"We can't drive, mother. Daddy's got the car."

"Oh dear!" cried Drusilla. She was vexed with herself; for she hated to disappoint the twins. Judith's face fell, and John, faintly blushing, held himself very still and would not look at his sister. Drusilla hurried to the rescue of the situation. "Never mind, we'll—" John waited to hear his mother say, brightly, that they should go to Claybrook Mere another day, and he forgave her, in advance, for not knowing that today and another day were worlds apart, and that pleasure deferred is pleasure lost. But with no pause she went on to say nothing of the kind. They would pack sandwiches and make a day of it. John, as the man of the party, should carry the provender in his haversack. If it was not too wet underfoot—and the frosty morning gave promise of a delicious crisp sponginess—they would take as many field-tracks as possible; and from so-and-so to somewhere else, which happened to be the dullest part of the journey, they might be lucky enough to get the bus, and so save themselves five or six miles.

It involved a more strenuous effort than Drusilla had allowed for, but she accepted the prospect cheerfully, welcoming it as a distraction from her thoughts. The room became noisy with excited talk, everyone agreeing that walking and bus-riding would be much more fun than going by car. And so in the event it proved. Annie the servant, by her own request, was left behind: to the secret relief of the children, who knew her to be a poor walker. They reached their destination with flushed cheeks, tingling skin,

and luxuriously wearied legs, and with appetites so keen that only a few crumbs could be spared for the birds of Claybrook Mere. The long, tree-fringed stretch of water presented this afternoon a scene of romantic and beautiful desolation, a wintriness touched with wonder by the sharp sunlight falling from a pearly sky. To Judith it was pattern and colour spelling out the first letters of a mystery which, though she felt its presence, she was too busy in her joy to concern herself with or to explore. For John this presence, this hint of meaning, was an excitement and a challenge. The details of the picture would not remain with him, as with Judith, clear-printed in memory; but the essence would remain like a phrase of music, a scent, a quickening thought, to haunt him in quiet moments. For both there was a deep imaginative pleasure in watching the birds: the ducks, the neat black moorhens, the occasional wagtail. They admired the smart drakes, their sleekness, their comic dignity, the shot-silk green-blue-purple of their glossy necks; and they agreed that the ducks, though less gorgeous, were not less beautiful in their delicate fashion. Judith feasted her eyes, taking permanent possession of form and colour, from the curve of the head and the sheen of the eye to the very texture of the feathers. So far as excited speech and gesture would serve, she shared her discoveries with John. His eye was less quick than hers: it was the aliveness of the creatures that held him fascinated and set him endlessly wondering.

"Darling," said Drusilla to Margaret, "your granny is dead."

Not quite knowing which world she belonged to, her mother's or the children's, Margaret hovered near Drusilla but without definitely attaching herself. There had



been only the most desultory conversation between them. Both were idly watching Judith and John, who were laughing and talking together a few hundred yards away, but Margaret's thoughts did not follow the direction of her eyes. Drusilla, glancing at the girl, felt a trembling within her at the sight of that youngness, that incomparable shy bloom which experience must so soon destroy. She could have wept for the exquisite fragility of this moment. In something less than three months the miracle had happened: at the end of last holidays Margaret had left home a child, and now had returned—as what? A child no longer and a woman not yet. In some sense and in some degree she was both; but to Drusilla who saw the change in her from the outside, and to Margaret herself who was vaguely aware of a change in the world around her, it was as if she had lost the security of childhood, its capacity for absorption in the present moment, without finding sure foothold elsewhere. The girl was troubled and entranced by intimations of a glory that had neither form nor name. An effulgent brightness lay in wait for her: she was homesick for a country she had never known and could but dimly conceive. She was alone; and the knowledge of that solitude, the common doom of man, made her both proud and a little afraid. She loved Judith; she loved John; she loved her mother and her father. But she was herself and no other, herself and alone. And being so, being consciously so, she was troubled, gladdened, filled with eagerness and touched with terror, by a vaguely apprehended desire to lose that aloneness in some sublime act of self-surrender. Alone she was: yet earth and sky were alive with hands caressing and voices whispering of love. The very sunlight that made the waters sparkle and quickened the wintry air with bright-

ness was to Margaret's sense a personal kindness, which sought and found itself or its fellow in her own responsive heart. And now, suddenly, because Granny was dead, her eyes filled with tears for her father.

"I didn't know," she said lamely, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes," said Drusilla, "she died yesterday. Daddy will be terribly upset."

Margaret looked away. "Are you going to tell the others, mother?"

She told the others when the party reassembled to begin the homeward journey. Judith said "Oh!" and lapsed into a long silence. Emily was almost a stranger to them all, except Robert, but the brightness of the day was dimmed for Judith. I oughtn't to have told them, thought Drusilla, but they had to know some time. John's reception of the news puzzled her: in some ways, in his unexpectedness, John resembled his father, she thought. At the words "Granny's dead", in John's mind a bell began tolling, spades were thrust into the frozen ground, an old woman lay rigid in death, and a yellow-bright coffin in a glass hearse drawn by long-tailed black horses went trailing by. He flashed one resentful glance at his mother and his sisters, and without a word about Granny began talking rapidly and noisily of the day's small events.

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## EMILY SAYS NOTHING

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AFTER following Emily's body to the cemetery, Robert at once addressed himself to the task of examining her effects. He glanced, wincing, at the life now defined and completed, affirmed and destroyed, by death. The indeterminate was determined, the wavering line had come full circle. In Emily's little parlour, which as the "best room" had long been the mausoleum of her small social aspirations, he found on the wall her mother's sampler:

ELIZABETH SARAH MAKINS  
aged 7 years

Jesus, permit Thy gracious Name to stand  
As the first effort of an infant hand  
And while her fingers ore the canvas move  
Engage her Innocence to seek Thy Love  
To this her sampler, Lord, some grace impart  
And set Thine own Ensample in her Heart.

19 APRIL A D 1841

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u  
v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Thy Will be Done

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

The child who with grave labour and much pursing of lips had worked this pretty thing had been many years dead, and now her own child, who had piously preserved it, was herself no more than a fiction of the mind, a complex of fragmentary memories. And since they are dead, he thought, there is no point in their having lived, no meaning, nothing. Life can be lived, and at moments enjoyed, but it does not bear thinking about, for to think about life is to know death. The fellow was wrong who said: Man hath no pre-eminence over the beasts. We are pre-eminent, unique, in that we know ourselves to be doomed. Yet if we are sufficiently simple, or sufficiently expert in self-deception, we contrive to dodge the unpalatable medicine. That's where religion comes in, and that's where Mother was luckier than some of us.

But though he called her lucky for the sake of his argument, he grieved in this moment as much for her life as for her death: her life that seemed to him now, as he looked back on what he knew of it, to have been so narrow in scope, so poor in substance, so little worth the trouble of living. Her chief joy, as he believed, and with good reason, had been in himself and in what she conceived as his success. He reproached himself with having neglected her, with having seen her less often than he might have done; but the doubt intruded whether this was anything more than the common delusion of bereavement, for in fact she had had a busy and not unhappy life, minding her shop, passing the time of day with the neighbours, watching the turn of the seasons, feeding the canary and talking to the cat, and in the scanty leisure of the evenings doing a little sewing or reading. Strangers who stopped their cars to buy a packet of cigarettes, or a bar or two of chocolate, had no

notion of the manifold interest life held for her. The bitterness of losing her husband gradually and imperceptibly vanished in the fact of the convenience of not having to live with him and worry about him and wonder what he would be up to, next; and the older she grew the keener became her appetite for the little things of existence. The waters of dailiness were shallow, perhaps, but never stagnant. Every year brought its ripples of commotion, its changes, its comings and goings in the district, its births, deaths and marriages, something to think of and talk about. As for Robert, he was her masterpiece. She thought of him with complacency as well as with love, and she had memories she shared with no one. Having launched him on the world, and endured the long agony of his war-service, she was more than content to lose him, to see him as a member of another social order than her own. In losing him she kept him: to this end she had laboured. In what she conceived to be his grandeur, his superiority to herself, she had a satisfaction not untinged with self-satisfaction; but, though she had pride in what she had positively done for him, it did not occur to her that the greatest part of her achievement was in letting him go. Robert, standing bereaved in the house that had so recently contained her, marvelled at that miracle of self-effacement. She had shared, with what reservations he could never know, his admiration for Drusilla; and if she had entertained any doubts of the wisdom of his marriage she had contrived to hide them from herself as well as from him. But in "knowing her place" she had been firm to the point of stubbornness, visiting him in his new home rarely, despite the unfeigned warmth of Drusilla's welcome. This he remembered with some shame, but it comforted him to

know that the bond between them, however little advertised, had remained unbroken to the end.

During her last ten years, when the sole charge of the shop would have been an uncomfortable burden upon her, Emily had had the companionship of a stranger from the north, Janet Henryson, who had come to her as an employee and remained as a trusted friend. At this moment Janet was in the next room, sitting among the empty tea-cups with the last lingering funeral guest. Situated behind the shop, it was the room in which Emily had lived her private life. This other, this "best parlour", she had never lived in. She had swept and dusted and polished it, and preserved certain treasures here, and she had perhaps sometimes stood idle in the doorway to pay musing tribute to a past she knew only by hearsay; but she had never humanized it with her own humanity, and it had, to Robert's sense, something of the chill of a disused chapel, as well as the pathos of vanished time. Yet Emily was here, if only by inference. The potted plant which stood in the now blinded window had been kept alive by her ministrations; the small bamboo table, covered with a plush cloth, supported her album of faded family photographs; two ornately framed pictures on the walls, one of Highland cattle, the other of a highly improbable shipwreck, had been kept free of cobwebs by her feather duster.

Robert's present business was with the proudest of all her possessions, the small rosewood tallboy in whose locked drawer she had kept, as he supposed, papers and old letters and perhaps some scraps of jewelry. With the key in his hand, the key which till recently had never gone out of her keeping, he yet hesitated to use it, being suddenly beset by a shrinking reluctance to violate this last sanctuary and

ravish from it, perhaps, a secret she had been careful to keep from him. Having been afraid to risk wounding her love and lowering her pride by asking questions while she was alive, he felt shame in the prospect of nosing out the answer now that she lay defenceless in the grave. Shame he felt: but he felt, too, a quickening excitement: it was of this, indeed, that he was ashamed. Curiosity so avid provoked the puritan in him and set up a resistance that almost persuaded him to evade his plain duty, which was to find his mother's will and put it into execution. But the plan did not bear scrutiny: there was a job that had to be done.

Before setting about it he went to the window and pulled up the venetian blinds. The window gave straight on to the pavement, and Robert stared for a moment into the populous suburban thoroughfare that had once, in his early childhood, been a village High Street. A sabbath quiet now had possession of it, but on any other day it would be busy with life. With sudden resolution he turned back into the room and planted himself in front of the tallboy. The light now released into the room gave it a new quality but did not bring it to life: never had sunshine seemed to him so cheerless. He opened each drawer in turn and glanced rapidly over the contents. One drawer was concerned solely with himself: a folded paper containing what was described, in Emily's hand, as *Robert's hair June 7th 16 months old*; a complete file of his school-reports; numerous letters he had written her; cuttings from the "University Reporter" showing that Robert had won an entrance scholarship, had taken his B.A., had proceeded in due course to his M.A., had been appointed Reader in Mediæval Philosophy, had become Tutor of his College (an office since resigned); photographs

of Robert as a baby, as a schoolboy, as a second lieutenant; and seeing these things he put his head in his hands and forgot what he was looking for. Presently, however, he came upon it, the will. With it was enclosed a sealed letter addressed to Janet Henryson. Being divided from Janet only by a door, he sat in a listening attitude, straining his ears to discern whether or not the tenacious Mrs Fairmile had finished enjoying the funeral and taken herself off. Hearing no sound of voices he got out of his chair and opened the door with gingerly caution. The living-room was empty, but the sound of water running on to the slopstone reached him from the scullery beyond. His caution relaxed: he breathed freely again.

"Janet!"

Janet, drying her hands on her apron, appeared in the doorway that communicated between living room and scullery.

"Something you want, Mr Robert?"

Janet's father had given her his name but not his speech. Her voice was colourless and flat, with scarcely a trace left of the singsong she had learned from her Northumbrian mother, and in this it was expressive of her, for colourless and flat, to which perhaps would be added goodnatured, seemed at first encounter to sum her up. Robert, more from gratitude than conviction, chose to believe that this colourlessness was only apparent, that there were delicate shades in her personality of which few besides Emily had ever been aware; but the poverty of her voice caused him even now a faint irritation.

"Will you come and have a talk when you're ready?" he asked. "I'll be in the front room." As she turned back to her washing-up he added, on an afterthought: "Perhaps



you wouldn't mind bringing a stove in with you? It's rather cold in here." The thought was rather for her than for himself: she was never so contented as when some service was required of her.

She joined him so quickly in the front room that he guessed she had been hurrying. While she bent down to light the oil stove he watched her nervously, divided between sympathy and impatience.

"I've found Mother's will," he said.

"Have you?" she answered. She looked at him vaguely, without intelligence. Her thoughts were scattered and she could not quickly recall them.

"Everything comes to you," he said.

A look of dismay came into her eyes. "Oh dear!"

"I'm very glad," said Robert. "It's just what I expected and hoped for."

Janet began sniffing with emotion, and when she spoke again her voice rose to a squeak. "She's always been too good to me, your mother has. But I don't want to take anything, I'm sure. . . ."

"Nonsense!" He was betrayed into speaking sharply, for he resented this new assault on his feelings. "Now listen, Janet. I'm executor and you're sole beneficiary, so everything's simple. I don't know what the estate amounts to. Mother told me nothing about her affairs. There's the shop, of course, and the house. Do you happen to know if they're mortgaged at all?"

"I'm sure I don't," said Janet.

He smiled at her oddly emphatic disclaimer, glad of something that could be smiled at. "When I've had time to go through this lot"—he nodded at the miscellany of documents he had unearthed—"I shall know all about it, no

doubt. And look, here's a letter Mother left for you. It was with the will."

He tried not to watch her while she read her letter from Emily. He was on edge. That the dead woman should have confided secrets concerning himself to a third person rather than to him was too fantastic for belief; yet it was this, or something like it, that he half-expected. He itched to see the letter, and suddenly, as if she had read his thought, Janet thrust it towards him without saying a word. Her manner was slightly dramatic, but the letter disappointed both his hopes and his half-formed fears: it said briefly, without sentimental preamble or epilogue, that the shop and what money there was was for her, Janet, but I want Robert, wrote Emily, to have for himself and his children whatever of my personal things he would like.

"That's only right," said Janet, in her toneless voice. She began drearily enumerating the things he might like to have. "There's the pictures, and the carvers, and a nice set of fish knives. I feel dreadful having the money, and you her own son. There's that lovely clock too: I daresay it could be made to go if a person understood about such things. And I *know*," she concluded, nodding respectfully at the tallboy, "I *know* she thought a lot of that little chest of drawers."

"I'm sure she did," answered Robert, conversationally. "It's a period piece, and you could probably get a good price for it if ever you wanted to sell it. But first of all we must see how you're placed financially. I understand from the bank that no cheques can be drawn on Mother's account until the will is proved, which will take some months. But I fancy they'll open a special account for us, to tide us over. You'll have no difficulty in carrying on. Fortunately,

so far as I can see, the will is in proper form. I expect she had help with it?"

Hearing the half-question in his tone she answered: "I'm sure I don't know, Mr Robert. She never said a word to me about it. It's all Greek."

"I must call at the bank again tomorrow," said Robert, "and then get back home. On the way through town I'll see my solicitors and set them to work." His manner was studiously matter-of-fact. "Now I wonder if you'd care to come and stay a few days with us at Cambridge, Janet? We should be very glad to have you."

He was relieved to hear her decline the invitation, but his conscience obliged him to urge it. "There's plenty of room in the car."

"Oh no," said Janet, in a rather shocked voice. "It's very kind of you, I'm sure. Everybody's been very kind. But I'd rather not leave the shop. Your mother wouldn't have liked that, I know she wouldn't."

After breakfast next morning, when he was about to take leave of her, Janet raised again the subject of Emily's letter. Nothing would appease her but that he should at once take something out of the house.

"There were some rings, I believe," she said, "and a silver bracelet, and I don't know what all. It'd be nice for you to have those, Mr Robert."

He hardly knew what to say to this. "Yes, I found them yesterday. But I'm sure they'd be of more use to you than to me."

To his surprise Janet stood firm. "They were her mother's before her, she told me. And now she's gone who should have them but her granddaughters? And I'd take it kindly if you'd have the little chest of drawers as well," said Janet,

fortified by the signs of his wavering.

"No, Janet. That's more than I can manage. The trinkets, yes, if it will make you any happier. But no little chests of drawers." He laughed. "I've looted it, and the stuff's in my suitcase: letters, title-deeds, passbook, and so on. Things I must look at more carefully. And now I'll go and get the car out." He offered his hand.

"I'll bring your bag out to the car when you're ready," said Janet. "And don't forget the jewelry, mind. Where shall I find it?"

Janet this morning was a person of more character than she had been yesterday. He wondered if it was the effect of becoming a woman of property. Now that he was so soon to be rid of her company he was better able to appreciate her fundamental goodness, and at the last moment, when he sat with his foot ready on the clutch and his hand on the gearstick, he brought a flush of pleasure into her sad sallow face by saying that he would like to take with him just one more thing that his mother had left, if Janet could spare it.

"The little chest?" exclaimed Janet, anxiously hopeful.

But no, it was the sampler that he wanted: the memory of it had just come back to him.

## UNHAPPY CHANCE

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HAVING waved a last farewell to Janet Henryson, Robert drove away. He was glad to be leaving this place that was so deeply saturated in memories; and now that the funeral was over, and the thought of death less urgent in its pressure, a strong tide of physical life began flowing again in his veins. In reaction from the pensive misery of these last days he turned to life with an almost brutal eagerness. He wanted to shout, to sing, to drive at a hundred miles an hour. He wanted to seize women and get children of them while there was still time—while blood still flowed in him and Death kept his distance. He rejoiced, suddenly and fiercely, in the existence of Margaret and Judith and John, the heirs of his seed; but the thought of them did not quench his desire for self-perpetuation. He thought gratefully of Drusilla and looked forward to seeing her again after these few days of absence. She meant to him home and the warmth of an unwavering affection; and his resentment of her age, and of the fact implied in her age that she was past child-bearing, was impersonal, or personal only to himself, a grievance against life, against fate, against his own blind folly. But it was none the less real for that. It was real and deep and bitter. And the dilemma, to his mind, seemed absolute: the situation at once sharpened desire in

him and rendered it impossible of fulfilment. Just beyond range of thought, fended away by a self-protective impulse, hovered the bitter-sweet memory of Mary Feathers, whose existence, whose love, whose ubiquitous presence with him, he had laboured to forget. The grief and distraction of seeing Emily die had played into the hands of that endeavour, and if his mind spared a glance for the girl now, it was a neutral glance and directed not at the Mary his heart had made its own, but at that earlier fiction, Miss Feathers, a young woman who was nothing to him but a very promising pupil.

In half an hour the region of houses was left behind. From either side green fields came flowing down, to be held back at the last, when they were all but upon him, by the streaming parallel hedgerows and the undulating white road. The day was bright enough to make one imagine it warm as well, though sober judgement would have declared it to be cold; and already, a fortnight before their time, birds were beginning to discuss the impossible hope of spring. Robert drove fast, taking an almost excited pleasure in the accession of power which the control of the car brought him, as though the throbbing engine, whose every variation of pulse he was immediately aware of, had been an organic part of himself. In this sense of extended being there was both release and an element of intoxication. It filled him with a boundless confidence, an illusion of immunity from mortal hazards. Abandoned to his exultation, driving with a careless and infallible-seeming dexterity, he flashed through towns and raced across open country, in imagination leaping the valleys and levelling the hills and leaving in his wake a conquered territory, flattened and subdued by his almighty thought. His spirit soared, his

senses became drugged and glazed, and "the Spinner of the Years said *Now!*" Turning a corner Robert saw something emerge from the hedge into his road. The physical world, from which for some fraction of time he had been absent, came crashing back into consciousness. He wrenched the wheel violently to the right, and, failing to straighten in time, plunged into the off-side hedge. The car crashed, pitching him against the door; the wheel struck him heavily on the chest; there was a sudden silence, in which, with surprise, he discovered himself to be still alive. For an instant he stayed motionless, considering this fact; then with trembling hand he groped for the door-handle. But the door had been twisted out of true: he could not open it. The passenger's door equally resisted him, but by climbing into the back of the car he was able to get out by way of the rear left door. He spared the merest glance for the car, the two right wheels of which were bogged in the ditch. Shading his eyes from the bright sunlight he stared back along the road. At first he saw nothing unusual. Then he saw something, a human shape, that lay on the grass verge of the opposite hedge and within five yards of a field-gate. He went stumbling towards it, saying to himself I've killed him. He stood staring down at his victim: an old bald man, who lay, unnaturally still, with one arm twisted under him and his face striped with three trickling streams of blood, like a fantastic decoration. Robert, bending over the body, believed it to be still breathing. The eyes were closed; the flesh of the forearm was cold to the touch; the mouth was fallen open. He ran to the ditch in search of water; soaked a handkerchief; and came back and began cautiously bathing the stranger's wounded forehead. The eyes flickered open; the lips moved. "You'll be all right," said Robert re-

assuringly. He was far from believing what he said. The sight of blood alarmed but did not nauseate him, but he handled his patient with conscious and carefully controlled distaste. The old man, moon-faced, bald, and with a skin that seemed ineradicably soiled, was hardly an agreeable object, though he appeared to be well-nourished and decently clothed. The mouth fumbled, and the conspicuously false teeth moved slightly, as though they had a life of their own. "Don't try to talk," said Robert, wincing. He went back to the car and flung open his suitcase, looking for something that might serve as a bandage. He possessed no first-aid outfit, so he decided to make the best job he could with strips torn off a spare shirt. During its search his hand encountered the brandy-flask which Drusilla had packed for him; and, supplied with these things, and with a leather cushion, he returned to the injured man. With infinite reluctance, expecting death at any moment to make an end of his work, he gently raised the head, slipped the cushion under it, and began bandaging. I wonder if I'm doing the right thing. Cursing his ignorance he hastened to unscrew the metal cap from the neck of the flask and to pour out a potion. The patient's eyes were now shut again. "Try and drink this," said Robert, raising the head with his left hand and proffering the cup with his right. "It'll make you feel better." At least he hoped it would. He succeeded in getting a substantial dose past the dental barricade, and noted with satisfaction that it was duly swallowed. He laid the head back on its pillow, and waited. Wait he must, till help of some kind should arrive. The car was stuck fast, the right headlamp broken, the front axle bent. The next town was some miles away. There were no houses in sight. He could not bring himself to leave the



old man and wander off vaguely looking for help: it seemed better, on the whole, to hope that something would presently arrive, a farm waggon perhaps or another car. He stood watching.

After a few moments the old man opened his eyes again, and this time intelligence looked out of them. "Where am I?" The question ended in a grunt of pain.

"Don't trouble to talk," said Robert. "We've had an accident. You'll be all right now."

On an afterthought he ran and fetched rugs from the car. Why the devil didn't I think of that before? "If you could manage to roll over a bit," he suggested, helplessly, foolishly, "I could make you more comfortable."

The old man did not offer to move. "Who are you?" he asked suddenly.

Robert spread the rugs over him. Better than nothing, he thought.

"Who are you?" repeated the old man. His voice was stronger: it sounded peevish. "I don't know you, do I?"

"No, I'm a stranger," said Robert, soothingly. He poured out some more brandy. "I was driving a car. I knocked you down. Are you feeling better?" Getting no answer he added, in apologetic self-justification: "You walked out from the hedge into the road. Don't you remember?" He bent down with the metal cup in his hand. "Have another drop of brandy."

"Brandy!" A feeble hand fended him off, spilling the brandy. "Poison!" rasped the old man.

"Oh come," protested Robert goodhumouredly, "it'll do you good, keep you warm."

Fanatical fire burned in the aged eyes. "That's the Devil speaking, young man. Get thee behind me, Satan!"

I'm wasting time, thought Robert. "Listen!" he said urgently. "Do you live about here? Where's the nearest house?"

"Who *are* you?" asked the patient, for the third time. "Why don't you tell me who you are?" he complained.

Robert controlled his exasperation. The wretched man was lightheaded, if not crazy. Best to humour him. "My name's Cordwainer. Robert Cordwainer. I'm on my way back to Cambridge, where I live." He spoke slowly and clearly, as if to a child. "And now I want to get help for you. Help for you, do you understand? Where is the nearest house, this way or that?" He pointed up and down the road, unable to recall where he had last noticed a house.

The patient stared up at him, eyes widened, underlip thrust out. "Cordwainer? Did you say Cordwainer?"

"Robert Cordwainer. But please—"

"Drusilla . . ." said the old man.

After a moment of astonished silence Robert said eagerly: "What's that you say?"

The old man sighed deeply, painfully, and shut his eyes. No longer aware of an audience, speaking mechanically as from a deep dream, he murmured: "Drusilla married a Cordwainer."

The words were barely audible, but Robert could not doubt that he had heard them. The shock of hearing that name from these lips started fantastic conjectures in his mind, but this was no time in which to pursue them. He was alarmed by the patient's apparent relapse into a state bordering on unconsciousness, and dared not take the risk of disturbing him with further questions. While he stood frenziedly wondering what to do next, the sound of distant cart-wheels drew his attention. He hurried towards the

sound, and rounding the corner observed a carter slowly approaching, at the head of a load of swedes. Robert, waving and shouting, broke into a run.

The countryman greeted him with slow surprise, listened sagely to his story, offering for comment raised eyebrows and a shake of the head. He brought his horse to a stand-still and came with Robert to where the old man lay.

"Bless my poor soul," he remarked, scratching his head.

"Do you know who it is?"

"Eh, that'll be Mr Print. Be um dead, d' ye think?" asked the carter, cocking a speculative eye at the prone figure.

"No," said Robert sharply. "Where's the nearest doctor?"

While the carter was considering this question Robert interrupted with another one. Where was the nearest hospital? Was there a telephone anywhere? A house, a cottage, anything!

Yes, there was a big hospital at such and such a place, a matter of fifteen-eighteen mile. Telephone? Well, old Mrs Sykes would see to that for um.

"Who and where is Mrs Sykes?" asked Robert.

"Post-office yonder," answered the carter, mildly surprised at his ignorance.

"Please take me to it. And we must hurry," said Robert, trembling on the verge of hysteria. "Come on. Which way? Is it far?"

"A tidy way. Maybe a couple of mile. Best ride in the waggon along of me, sir."

They climbed up, and the carter spoke to his horse, flicking the broad buttocks with a slack rein. We could walk quicker, thought Robert impatiently. But being not sure enough of his judgement to insist on doing so, he was forced

to be content with a speed of five or six miles an hour.

"A rare religious gentleman, was Mr Print," remarked the carter. "It's a sad business with these motor-cars."

Robert said nothing. It was not lost on him that the fellow insisted of speaking of Mr Print in the past tense. His heart contracted with anxiety. He knew that he would never drive again.

In ten minutes or so a gaunt stone house came into view. "That's where he used to live," said the carter, pointing. "Zion House they call it. And there's writing on the wall."

A low stone wall, surmounted by hideous iron railings, enclosed the front garden of Mr Print's house, which stood, bleak and solitary, at the point of intersection of two roads. On this wall, in white paint, was the staring legend: Be sure your sins will find you out.

"He warn't a reverend," said the carter, making conversation, "but he were a preacher. And a hot 'un too, I'll tell ye."

"Why do you say he *used* to live there?" asked Robert, stung into speech. "Doesn't he live there still?"

"Won't be living anywhere long by the look of um."

"There's a car coming," said Robert. "I can hear it." Without waiting for the carter to draw up he jumped into the road and held both arms above his head. A yellow two-seater, racing model, flashed into sight and bore down upon him. He stood unmoving, a stone image. The car came smoothly to a stand within three yards of him, and the driver, a hawk-faced young gentleman wearing a leather coat and large fur gloves, sat unperturbed, awaiting an explanation.

## TOM HAS A NOTION

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ON THAT distant day of their first coming together, nothing could have seemed less likely on the face of it than that the alliance between Tom and Clara would prove to be a permanent one. That they had taken a powerful fancy to each other was evident and admitted; but neither of them, at the moment, had looked far into the future. It was none the less true that after two or three days together the notion of parting would have been highly disagreeable to both. But in fact no such notion occurred to them. They exchanged no vows, made no promises, but it gradually came to be tacitly assumed that there was no term set to this honeymoon. Tom Cordwainer liked to think of himself as a masterful man, but though it was he who made the plans it was Clara's confident knowledge of her own mind that made planning possible and necessary. Under the surface of her careless and generous enjoyment of whatever life offered at the moment, she was as provident and practical as he, without her, was indolent and easygoing. Not that he was that alone: he was shrewd, he could be stubborn, he had a temper which she quickly learned to respect. In short he was worth while. She soon became aware that he was the man she wanted, and wanted "for keeps"; but—in her blood, not in her mind—she knew better than to tell him as much, or half as much.

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She practised no conscious arts, and knew none; but she knew by mother-wit that the moment he became dead sure of her his delight would begin to wane. By keeping him short of that certainty, by making it clear that she was nobody's property but her own, she kept him alert and happy. Her tongue had the trick of being sharp without malice; her love, honest and deep, was salted with irony. She was precisely the woman for Tom Cordwainer, and that fact, at least, she had no objection to his knowing. And know it he very soon did.

He had known it then, and in a very different temper, less excitedly, less consciously, but more profoundly, he knew it now, a quarter of a century later. "You've been my mascot, Clara," he was fond of saying in his old age. "I touched lucky when I touched you." It was no more than the truth, and it was truer than he knew. Clara had happened along just in time: in time to take possession of an aimless, disappointed, middle-aged man, in imminent danger of sinking once and for all into sluggish discontent, and to make of him the man he had in youth supposed himself to be. She had brought him up to the mark and kept him there. She gave point and purpose to his life and made him feel equal to anything: in her young vigour, her lusty realism, her personal quality compact of earth and fire, he renewed himself, body and spirit. A more thoughtful man would have perhaps been daunted by the difficulty of starting life afresh, with a new woman, in a new place, and with only a few pounds behind him. But it was not Tom's way to worry about money while he had a sovereign left in his purse. He did not doubt his capacity to earn a living for himself and Clara, and in the event his self-assurance was justified. He had his carrier's horse and cart; and Clara's

tin box contained all the clothes she could wear out in six months. If the elopement had been planned it could hardly have been more fortunately planned. With such a good start, and possessed of assets so solid, Clara could entertain no serious misgivings. Her chief financial concern, in those first weeks, was for Emily. She had no scruples about taking another woman's man, but she did definitely require to be convinced that she wasn't stealing another woman's breadwinner. For one thing it would be mean, and for another it would cause a deal of trouble. Tom left her in no doubt on the point. Emily not only had her shop: she had also a little bit of money of her own coming in for the boy. Where it came from made no matter. Clara believed him; Emily was never mentioned again between them; and next day, with her own money, the girl purchased two small tins of paint and two brushes, in one of the villages they passed through. "What are them for?" asked Tom, with an admiring grin. With her own hands, which possessed a passable talent for the job, she painted out the name Cordwainer on the cartside and put Jones in its place. Since he couldn't in law give her his name, she proposed to endow him with her own; she had no intention of being pestered with awkward questions about a name so conspicuously unusual as Cordwainer. "News travels quick," she remarked sagely. "Quicker than you and me can." They called themselves Thomas and Mrs Thomas Jones from that day. Half an hour's earnest work with the paintbrush was the only marriage ceremony that Clara was ever to experience. It served well enough: she wanted no other.

At the moment of Robert's encounter with Mr Print, and a hundred miles more or less from the scene of that disaster, Tom Jones, né Cordwainer, sat in the bar-parlour



of his alehouse, The Coach and Six, warming his toes at a scanty fire. Across his knees rested a voluminous morning newspaper which its owner, who had paid the extravagant sum of twopence for it, had left behind a day or two ago. It was all too seldom that strangers patronized the house; Tom's customers, mostly farm-labourers, were drawn from a circle with something less than a mile's radius. But even gentry in smart motor-cars must sometimes take a glass of beer, and this particular specimen had inadvertently provided Tom with something to brood on, at intervals, for many a day to come. From the very front page it leapt out at him, a name, his own name. Two curt lines of print recorded that Emily was dead. Name, address, age, it was her, right enough: no getting away from it. And no getting away from the surprise of it. It made him feel quite queer. Queer and for a moment lonely. He could even have shed a tear or two if he hadn't long lost the trick of it. Funny, after all this time, he reflected. It'll be young Bobbie that put that in, there's no doubt. She was never *my* sort, never *really* my sort, insisted Tom. But it hurt him, a little, that she was dead. Time had made him stouter, heavier, slower in movement, and he had forgotten more than he remembered; yet what had been written in him had never been erased, and the earlier pages of the story, if a man chanced to look at them, could be as vivid, almost, as the now he lived in.

The doorway communicating between the parlour and the public bar became filled with the presence of a bronze-haired vigorous woman who might have been as much as fifty years old and was in fact fifty-five. Not even Tom could see in Clara the young wench who with such heart-lifting animal grace had sauntered out of the railway station at

Fallow Green, half a lifetime ago, to take permanent possession of his fancy; and when he did chance to remember that wench he thought of her, oddly, as though she were someone else. This, had she known it, would have surprised the Clara she now was: it was perhaps the most significant difference between his notion of her and her own.

"Very quiet again this morning," said Clara.

She alluded to the fact that though the doors had been open three quarters of an hour not a single pint had been required of her.

Tom grunted, having nothing to say. Being by nature and long habit a sanguine man, he supposed, as always, that something, as always, would turn up; but he could not deny that at this moment times were about as bad as they had ever been. Just as his energy was beginning to decline—and surely to goodness a man can think of taking life a bit easy at seventy-one!—things were moving downhill. The new tax on beer had lost him a good thirty per cent of his turnover. Chaps who had always taken two or maybe three pints of an evening were now making do with one; the half-pinters sometimes didn't come in at all; there was less standing treat. In fine, Tom and Clara were hard put to make ten shillings a week above their rent; and this at a time when there were two new mouths to feed. Their daughter Kate, having got herself into trouble and married its author, had soon found herself with the worst of the bargain and was now back home with her parents, nursing her bruises and her baby. Tom had enjoyed thrashing the young husband (who had never supposed the old man to have so much blood in him), and Clara had enjoyed hearing about the thrashing; but that kind of satisfaction did not help to nourish either Kate or her baby. The fellow was a worthless

rat, and destined for the gallows, in Tom's opinion; and I'll be danged, said he, if I let him come near a daughter of mine, ninny though she was ever to take up with him. Ninny Kate was indeed: her parents admitted to each other a fact of which the merest hint from another would have made them flare up in anger. She wasn't her mother's daughter, nor yet her father's, as the saying was; but if she hadn't common sense she had uncommon prettiness and a sweet disposition, and there's something, said Tom to himself, in being a grandfather.

"What are you looking so crafty about?" asked Clara, hungry for a bit of talk.

The word described his look with more aptness than she knew. A notion had just come into Tom's head, and it was not a notion that he proposed to communicate to Clara.

"I was thinking," said he, "that maybe it's time we put the banns up, you and me."

"Huh!" She tossed her head, in quite the old way. "Don't you let the neighbours hear you talking that kind of talk, Mr Jones!"

They grinned at each other. "Well, it's just as you please," said Tom. "I'm ready when you are, lass."

He remembered, suddenly, that perhaps the occasion was not one for grinning; and his change of countenance surprised her into asking: "What bree's biting you now, monkey?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Seems I'm a widow-man," he said, with a shrug, looking away from her.

Slowly she puzzled out his meaning. Moving into the room she exclaimed: "What d' you mean, Tom?"

Already she guessed his meaning, and for no reason in logic it filled her with the strangest kind of wonder. He

showed her the entry under DEATHS. After all this time, thought Clara. And a woman she had never seen. She looked at Tom, questioning, but now knowing the substance of the question. Tom met the look and answered it, not knowing what he answered. But that something flashed between them making them one, something more subtle than thought and more vivid than sensation: this they did know. The ghost of their first day was with them, filling the room with the scent and colour of a time which, like a bubble in a bubble, a core of iridescence in a sphere ever expanding, was contained in the present moment.

It was a flash and no more. It dawned and passed away, leaving Clara with an odd twinge of desolation, of being shut out from something which Tom must be remembering alone. With a jealousy not of Emily but of his unknown youth she longed to penetrate his thoughts and to possess what she could never possess. Recognizing this impulse for the folly it was, she shook herself resolutely free of it, but some traces lingered to find expression in her wry comment.

"Poor thing! She wouldn't have thought much of me."

It was Emily's epitaph, but Clara felt it to be in some sense her own too.

"I'm not so sure," said Tom. "Anyway she's gone."

There was nothing more to be said. Tom guided the talk into other and shallower waters, and soon it dwindled away. Tom in old age was not a talkative fellow, and when he was planning something he was apt to be more silent than usual. Time and again, as the day wore on, he was on the point of telling Clara of what had come into his head. But no, he told himself, bedtime's best. And even when bedtime had come, even when he had blown out the candle and lay by her side in the friendly encouraging darkness,

he confided to her only the beginning of what he proposed.

"I'm off to London next week, Clara."

"Eh?" said Clara. Used to his suddenness though she was, the information startled her. But one of the things she had learned by long experience was not to confess to surprise at Tom's caprices.

"Yes, that's the idea," said Tom easily, as though everything had been now explained.

In the darkness their voices were disembodied, and at once intimate and impersonal.

"It'll be twelve months or more since you went there."

"So it is," agreed Tom. "Time I went again."

A new note sounded in the woman's voice. "Is it about *her* you're going?"

"In a way yes, in a way no," said Tom. "I'm going to look up an old acquaintance. See if I can run him to earth. No one you know."

Amusement and impatience struggled together in Clara. "No one I'm going to know either, by the sound of it, you silly old oyster!"

"It's a doctor. Name of Hewish. Of course he may be dead for all I know. But if he ain't . . . well, we'll see."

"A doctor!"

"There's ways of finding out. Directories and such. But not in this dead-and-alive place."

"What d' you want a doctor for, Tom?" She put out a hand, groping to touch him.

"Nothing wrong with me, don't you fret," said Tom quickly. "Never felt better in my life."

"But you said a doctor," insisted Clara.

"That's right. A doctor he is. Ask no questions you'll be told no lies, lass. But I'll tell you this much, if you're a good

girl. It's him the money used to come from."

"What money? D' you mean—"

"Yes, Emily's bit of money. Once a month, regular as clockwork. It's an old story and a long 'un. And it'll keep, see?"

"Please yourself," said Clara. It was on the tip of her tongue to say: I hope she came by it honest. But she kept the words back: it wasn't worth while making trouble at this time of day. "So you want to be off on the spree, do you?"

"That's it," said Tom cordially. "There's still a few pounds in the stocking. And maybe I'll bring back more than I take with me."

Clara didn't much like the sound of that. "Don't you go getting into mischief, Mr Jones!" she admonished him.

"Trust *me*," said Tom.

His voice was already drowsy; and Clara, taking the hint, decided to postpone further questions till the morning. She was not without hope of weaning him from his sudden irrational resolution.

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## FATHER AND DAUGHTER

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Two men came home in Robert's skin. In the darkness of his being they disputed for possession of him. He was a man hungry for the solace of home, the bread and wine of habitual things, a man in whose heart glowed the warm

assurance of being received and welcomed into his own quiet and busy world, after wandering in these waste lands of the spirit. But he was also a man in whom the seed of a jealous fever had been sown. The seed might never fructify: a word, if only it were the right word, could destroy it. Nor was he conscious of anything in himself more dangerous than an irritated curiosity, a small recurring question that could seldom be heard above the tumult of his major anxiety. Who this Mr Print could be, and whence his acquaintance with Drusilla, were points of less immediate urgency than whether he would live or die. If he died, Robert would have been the means of his death, and that knowledge would be a reproach to him for ever. There would be an inquest; his name would be shouted in every dirty newspaper; and in fact, if not in form, he would be put upon his trial. Until this overriding question of life or death should be resolved, he could not have brought himself to drive again, and so was under no temptation to wait while the car was being repaired. It would take a day or two, they told him; and he was glad of the excuse to continue his journey in a series of trains.

He reached home on Tuesday afternoon, having been nine days away. In almost any other circumstances he would have preferred to walk the few miles between Cambridge station and his house, if there were no bicycle available; but being encumbered with luggage he took a taxi, though it went against the spartan grain in him.

While he was paying off the cab Margaret came running out of the house and greeted him with easy friendliness.

"Hullo, darling!"

She had caught this style of address from her mother, years ago, and now used it but seldom. Its semi-maternal

quality never failed to cause Robert a ripple of amused pleasure.

"Well, Margaret!" He glanced at his daughter with profound satisfaction. "You've grown. I'm dashed if you haven't!"

Margaret laughed. "Since you went away?"

"Seems weeks to me," said Robert. "Yes, you're quite a young lady."

"Am I?" She took his arm and they sauntered up the drive towards the house, where, at the open door, Drusilla stood waiting for them. "Well, you're quite a young man, so we're a pair, aren't we?"

"How dare you flirt with your father!" retorted Robert.

It came home to him with surprise that in weighing his occasions for bitterness he had not always remembered to put Margaret in the other scale. He believed that between himself and Margaret there existed a unique and unspoken understanding. In general, even at home, she was apt to be reserved, shy, difficult of approach; but though he did not pretend to know the secret places of her heart, and was in fact quite unaware of the delicate passionate dreams that were maturing in her maturing loveliness, he did find in her friendly responses to himself a candour and a precocious humour which he liked to think were for him alone. Their relationship was marked by an affectionate and unsentimental urbanity. His notions of how parents and children should behave to each other were those of an earlier generation; he owed it perhaps to Drusilla, and in part to Margaret herself, that his practice in this matter was more genial than his preaching; the satisfaction he had known in the existence of his firstborn child, miraculous extension of himself, had happily seduced him from the



duty of playing the heavy father. She had been two years old, and already a definite personality, when he first saw her; making friends with the young stranger had been the oddest and most exciting sequel to his home-coming from the battlefields of France; and he quickly and imperceptibly forgot his wish that she had been a boy.

"What have you done with the car, daddy?" asked Margaret.

He had expected the question earlier. It was just like Margaret, he thought, to have postponed this encounter with the obvious.

"I smashed it up, my dear," he answered coolly. "You'll hear all about it in good time."

He smiled a greeting to Drusilla, and, setting down his two suitcases, exchanged with her the kiss of long custom. "Children not home yet?"

"Not yet," said Drusilla. "You're nice and early, Robert. How are you, my dear?"

"Oh, well enough," he answered. The cloud of his unhappiness reappeared on the horizon. "Are you?"

"We'll get you some tea," said Drusilla. "Ah, here's Annie. Let Annie take your bags upstairs for once. You must be tired."

"I'm not in the least tired," said Robert, divided between gratitude and annoyance. "I came by train and had a cab from the station."

With an effort Drusilla refrained from expressing her surprise till Annie had disappeared with the luggage. And then, aware of something antipathetic in Robert's manner, she refrained for his sake and her own. She knew that he disliked being fussed, and that her vivacity sometimes jarred on him.

They went, all three, to the drawing-room, where tea would presently be brought in.

Something disagreeable has happened, thought Drusilla, noticing his silence, his self-isolation, as he sat down and stretched out a hand to the fire. It was as if she and Margaret were already shut out from his thoughts.

"Have you had an accident with the car, darling?" she presently asked.

"Yes," he said, but without looking up. "I knocked a man down."

Aware of the sudden startled silence, the staring eyes, he added: "An old man. His condition is critical."

Drusilla spoke her first thought. "And you're not hurt?"

"No." It sharpened his sense of guilt that he had survived the accident unscathed. Embarrassed by the solicitude with which they waited for him to speak, his elderly wife and his attractive young daughter, he got out of his chair and with his back to the fire embarked on the full story, giving details of time and place and circumstance. When the questions and the exclamations had died down he said firmly, pronouncing judgement on himself: "It wasn't entirely my fault. But it was more my fault than his."

"How can you say that?" protested Drusilla. "He jumped out of the hedge without warning. How could you know he was going to do that?"

"He didn't jump. I didn't say that. He suddenly appeared. Presumably he'd walked across the field and came out by the gate."

"A concealed gate," said Drusilla, counsel for the defence.

"A concealed gate," admitted Robert. "But if I had had my wits about me I could have avoided him."

"Were you going fast?"

"I don't know. It didn't seem particularly fast. But certainly I was going *too* fast." He shrugged his shoulders. "We needn't argue about it. There's no doubt at all that I'm much to blame."

"You did all you could for him," said Drusilla. "Was he unconscious?"

"Not all the time. The brandy brought him round for a moment or two."

"How did you get him to hospital?" Margaret asked.

Drusilla's question had brought the whole scene vividly back: the bald ugly old man lying helpless on the grass verge of the road and, incredibly, as from a dream, uttering her name. Robert, distracted by this enigma, watched his chance to get at the truth of it. He watched intently, biding his time, even while the rest of the story came easily out of his mouth. He told of his meeting with the carter, the arrival of the yellow car, the difficulty of disposing the injured man in the dicky which was the only available place, and finally of their reception at a large hospital twenty miles away.

The story finished, he dismissed it with an impatient gesture.

"Let's leave it. I must go and do some work."

"Must you?" asked Drusilla. "There'll be time enough tomorrow, won't there?"

"Tomorrow!" he said. "Do you realize, my dear, that I've missed two lectures and three classes? You did let people know in time, I hope?"

"Of course. I'm sure nobody will have any grievance in the circumstances."

"I daresay," said Robert. "But I must make it up to

them, all the same. Double shifts this week." He laughed shortly. "I can't have students saying in their examination papers that they know nothing about Kant's theory of perception because their Director of Studies had the misfortune to lose his mother."

His women laughed, a little uncomfortably. But Margaret said: "If you ask me, I think that would be a most amusing answer."

He rewarded her with an appreciative smile, grateful to her for having extracted the sting from his little joke.

"Yes, Annie," said Drusilla. "You may clear away."

Annie was in the doorway, a tray in her hand. "Very well, madam. But it wasn't that: it was a telegram. And is there an answer please, the boy says."

Robert took the telegram, tore it open, and read it. Lucian Print died this morning.

"No answer," said Robert. Annie withdrew, shutting the door behind her.

Drusilla said: "Is it bad news, Robert?"

She received the telegram from his hand.

Having read it, she stared at the words stupidly, in a kind of dream. Lucian Print. What did that mean? Who was Lucian Print? The name had so strange a compulsion on her mind that she forgot to ask herself where the telegram had come from and why it had been sent to Robert. Her inward mind groped forward and shuddered away. Something was knocking at the inmost gates of her being, something that must not be let in. Knock, knock, knock. In the dark theatre beyond thought she ran distractedly to and fro, keeping her eyes tight shut, stuffing fingers in ears that she might not hear. Knock, knock, knock. The knowl-

edge loomed nearer; the knocking grew louder; the gates were forced; she was betrayed from within; and at last with a tearing grinding agony the womb of the unconscious yielded up its monstrous hoard. Lucian Print. Uncle Lucy. Uncle Lucy in Wilbury Woods, plump, persuasive, treacherous.

Robert was shocked and shaken by the terms of the telegram, but his resolution held, and he watched his wife narrowly. He saw her stare, saw her eyebrows lift, saw the sudden sharp intake of her breath. But he could not see into her mind, where a hated picture had lain buried for some forty years, awaiting just such a resurrection as this. For the moment Robert was at a loss how to interpret her agitation. How should she not be agitated by this fulfilment of his fears, the death of the man he had run over? And yet . . .

She suddenly met his glance, and he saw that she was afraid.

"What does this mean?" she asked, helplessly. The steel of his glance made her half-wonder if it were some trick he was playing her.

"It means what it says," said Robert, smiling wryly. "It means that Mr Lucian Print is dead. And that I have killed him."

"You!" she cried, bewildered. Then the simple truth dawned in her. Controlling herself she asked, in a flat tone: "I see. You mean this was the man you ran into."

"Who else could it be?" asked Robert sharply. Suspicion was now a white flame in him.

Even now she hardly realized, as Robert all too quickly did, the implications of her mistake. But she knew she was

being put upon her defence.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said confusedly. "It was rather a shock, I suppose."

The sound of voices in the hall outside told Robert that John and Judith were back from school. He said to Margaret: "Don't let the twins come in here. Your mother and I want to talk." And as soon as the door had closed on Margaret he resumed the attack without mercy. "Why should it have been a shock, Drusilla, if you didn't know what it meant?"

"After all, I can read, my dear," said Drusilla, with a languid irony. She was not an actress for nothing. "The news of death is apt to give one a shock, don't you think?"

"Even a stranger's death?" asked Robert, with a smile that looked like hate.

"Yes, even that," she answered. "That's how it is with me, anyhow."

"Lucian Print," said Robert slowly. "You don't by any chance recognize the name, do you?"

She shook her head, eyes widening in apparent surprise. "How should I, Robert? Do you?"

Robert, too, could act on occasion. Imposing a sudden calm on his demeanour he gave no further sign of the storm that raged in him. The further to deceive her he guided the talk into safe channels, speaking of the inquest which was now inevitable, and speculating lightly on his chances of being charged with manslaughter. Give her rope, he thought, and she'll hang herself. For it was another kind of inquest that chiefly occupied him now. Print's death was a shock, but a shock he had more than half-expected; and now, with this new obsession to torment him, he would hardly have troubled to wish the fellow alive again except

for the purpose of extorting the truth from him. His notion of what that truth could be had grown in the space of a few seconds to something of hideous shape and fantastic dimensions. A word, had it been the right word, could have cleared his mind, sick though it was, of all suspicion. Drusilla had done worse than not speak that word: she had disavowed all knowledge of Lucian Print in the very moment of demonstrating, by her behaviour, that she had such knowledge. Till then, till that denial, Robert had stopped far short of conceiving the monstrous idea which jealousy had now begotten upon him. The passion of self-blame was over: he no longer spared a single pulse of regret that he by negligence had been the means of a man's death. Nor did the prospect of facing a coroner dismay him: indeed it scarcely interested him. Drusilla had lied: why should she lie except to conceal something too vile to be confessed? And what could that vileness be except the vileness now taking root in his inflamed imagination? Lucian Print and Drusilla! That plump old scarecrow and Drusilla! During the first days of their marriage Robert had asked her a question, which she, with what now seemed the smoothest cunning, had somehow evaded; and the effect had been that he believed himself to be her first and only lover. On his faith in Drusilla his whole subsequent life had been built. But now all certitude crumbled. The sky turned liquid, and the ground quaked underfoot. What did he know of this woman: of her antecedents, and of her life during his absence in France, during the hungry years that had followed the sharp snatched bliss of their honeymoon? How could he be sure, even, that Margaret, his beloved Margaret . . .

Margaret came to the study to tell him that dinner was ready. She came and sat on the arm of his chair, saying: "I

shouldn't worry about it, daddy, if I were you."

He looked at her steadily, unsmiling; and some quality in the scrutiny made her flinch a little. He fancied the gesture reminded him of something. Of something, of someone.

She asked, in a small, hurt voice: "Why are you staring so?"

He moved his hand away from hers and stood up. "There's something of your mother about you, Margaret. But nothing of me, I fancy."

"I'm sorry," said Margaret. "Shall we go in to dinner? Mother's waiting."

His stare persisted until, in discomfort and bewilderment, she turned from him and went out of the room, leaving him to follow when he would.

He stayed, for a moment, to conjure his memory anew and to compare that with this. Between an ill-favoured old man and a lovely young girl budding into womanhood, what possible resemblance could there be? Feature by feature there was none. But a family likeness is notoriously indefinable, a complex of subtleties too delicate for speculation. He was haunted by the sense of having, a moment ago, perceived such a likeness.

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## FIRST INVESTIGATOR

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ROBERT's plan of making up to his pupils their lost time was thrown into confusion by his having to travel a hundred miles to attend the inquest on Lucian Print. Drusilla begged him to consult a legal-minded colleague in the university, and at last, rather against his will, he did so. This colleague told him what he already knew: that coroners have a trick of turning into prosecuting counsel and must therefore be treated with firmness and tact. He added some specific advice about the form his answers should take. Robert resented the ordeal rather than dreaded it. Print's death, to his mind, was already an old story: what Robert was concerned with was the man's life. In the event the inquest went off tamely enough. Robert was the only witness of first importance. Obedient to his instructions he expressed his profound regret and remarked that he would never forgive himself for having failed to avert the disaster. He said also that his speed had not been excessive, that the deceased had appeared suddenly in his road, that he had driven a car for three years and had never before been involved in an accident. He described what he had done for the injured man, and confirmatory evidence was given by the carter, the owner of the yellow two-seater, and a garage mechanic. The medical evidence was straightforward, and a verdict of death by mis-

adventure was duly recorded.

Towards the end Robert was hard put to it to conceal his impatience. This interruption of his life irked him intolerably, though, as he saw it, he had now no better use for his time than to search out an infamous secret. He was not yet, however, entirely at the mercy of this inquisitorial lust. His lifelong habit of self-command reasserted itself, and he began to give ear to the voice of his own reason. With Drusilla he maintained a strange politeness. He asked her no more questions. With Margaret he was gently detached; and the two younger children, he believed, found nothing amiss in his manners. It was a point of moral pride with him not to allow a private anxiety to get in the way of his academic work; and, in deference to his idea of himself as a man of iron resolution, he decided to leave the problem of Drusilla in abeyance until the term's end. There was only a week to run, and during that week he gave himself without stint to his professional duties.

The first day of vacation released him for a task for which, as he discovered with surprise, he had little stomach. The poison in his mind had been subdued by the antidote of hard work, and the edge of his curiosity about Lucian Print was somewhat blunted. He sickened at the thought of pursuing that inquiry further, and though in his heart he knew that nothing ultimately could turn him from it he welcomed the distraction afforded by Emily's affairs, which now, without more delay, must be looked at and put into order. Among the documents he had brought back with him from Emily's house were diaries, account books, and a solicitor's letter informing the recipient, in the strictest confidence, that a quarterly payment of twenty-five pounds would be made to her, on the instructions of a client who

wished to remain anonymous. We understand, the letter continued, that the identity of this person is not unknown to you; but we have no doubt that you will appreciate the importance of respecting his wishes in the matter. This letter was dated in the year of Robert's birth. The diaries, covering the first three years of his existence, brought tears to his eyes but told him nothing to the point. The earliest of the account books, which Emily had no doubt supplied herself with from her own stock, provided food for more suggestive thought. It was a simple record of moneys received and spent. One enigmatical entry occurred, at monthly intervals, three times: after the date of the solicitor's letter it occurred no more. With this fact conspicuously in his mind Robert took train to London, sought out the firm's offices, and sent in his card.

Mr Linthorne, of Linthorne and Denby, was a benevolent grey wolf, very neat in his attire and very sympathetic in his manner.

"My late mother, Emily Cordwainer," said Robert, "had an allowance of a hundred pounds a year from some person unknown."

"Yes?" said Mr Linthorne.

"The money has been paid in quarterly instalments for the last forty years."

Mr Linthorne nodded. "I see."

"It's hardly necessary for me to mention," said Robert, with a smile, "that these payments have been made through you. I mean, of course, through your firm."

"Ah, indeed?" said Mr Linthorne.

With the politest interest he waited for Robert to come to the point.

"I admire your discretion, Mr Linthorne," said Robert.

"But is it quite necessary? You have my card, I see. I am my mother's only son, her only child in fact. I am also her executor."

"Perfectly," said Mr Linthorne. "And you wish me to have the will proved for you?"

"Not exactly. That's already in other hands. What I want is the name of my mother's benefactor."

"Ah," said Mr Linthorne, "there I cannot help you, Mr Cordwainer."

"Why?" asked Robert bluntly. "You don't pretend not to know all about it?"

"I certainly can't recall the details at this moment. But I don't deny that we must have somewhere a record of the arrangement. If my memory serves me it was made in my father's time. Forty years ago, I think you said? Yes, that would be in my father's time. I was at my prep school then, I fancy. Dear me, how time flies!"

"But—" began Robert.

"Your best plan, if I may advise you, would be to ask your own solicitors to put through an inquiry to us. We could then apply for instructions to the person concerned, if he or she should prove to be still alive."

"He or she," remarked Robert sarcastically, "was certainly alive as recently as January of this year, or presumably the January payment would not have been made."

"It doesn't follow, my dear sir. Oh, by no means. If such a thing as a Trust Fund existed, for example, it could no doubt be operated, if proper provision had been made, notwithstanding the decease of the initial source of such a fund." He rose from his chair. "Forgive me if I say no more. I assure you it would be most irregular."

This not entirely unexpected check, so far from persuad-

ing Robert to let the secret sleep, imported a new element of anger into his resolve to discover the truth about Emily and about himself. He did not pause to consider what effect the truth might have on his view of the mother he mourned: it was enough that something vitally concerning him was being hidden from his legitimate curiosity. After leaving Lincoln's Inn Fields he rang up his solicitors, and following Mr Linthorne's advice put the official inquiry in train. Then, having posted a card to Drusilla telling her that he would stay in London for a few days, he established himself in an hotel in the Strand, from which vantage-point he proposed to wait upon events.

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## SECOND INVESTIGATOR

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THE waiting was not so unpleasant as Robert had imagined it would be. The busyness of London, the rattle and roar which he could largely escape by the simple expedient of hiding away from it, in the vast padded rooms of the hotel, was a medicine for his mind even while it threatened to be a weariness to his physical nerves. It was agreeable, augmenting his sense of power, to be at the comparatively quiet centre of so noisy and complex an activity as the streets held. By providing a spectacle and a distraction, by offering a vicarious existence which he might take or reject at his fancy, it added relish to his solitude. The hotel was one to which he had often resorted. The porters, the liftmen, the

waiters, the severe but not implacable spinster who disposed the guests and had charge of the keys and the hotel register, all flattered him with recognition.

He made himself more than at home. More than at home, because here, while everything conduced to his comfort, the environment was utterly neutral, making no demands on his sociability. There was no one here to be hurt by his silences or dismayed by his humours, no one whose wishes or expectations or affections he need for a moment consider. Added to his itch for information was now a zest that was almost impersonal, like the zest with which, at the beginning of his academic career, before more general studies had claimed him, he had pursued his researches into the lives and doctrines of the mediaeval schoolmen: for hours together he would forget his personal concern with the truth he was looking for, and give himself to the excitement of the search. The morning after his arrival he walked the streets, filling his ears with noise and his eyes with a confused panorama, picture of futility and blind faith. He saw men and women, not as trees walking, but as virtually mindless eager animals, scampering about, doing their little tricks and being endlessly busy, and all to no ultimate purpose. In the wake of this vision came the image of his brother-in-law, Philip Moore, in whose novels some such view of mortal life, but softened in outline, lit with human sense, and touched to poetry by a warm imagination, had found repeated expression. Robert looked askance at what he conceived to be an excessive liberalism in his brother-in-law; but he admired his talent and could enjoy his company, and he caught himself now, with surprise and with some indignation, wondering whether he should ring Philip up and suggest a meeting. He rejected

the idea instantly: impossible that he should fraternize with Drusilla's brother while Drusilla was still suspect. Besides, the fellow had probably got some woman in tow: in which event, Philip having an artless trick of taking one's approval for granted, he might find himself tacitly giving countenance to a situation he disapproved of. For the past ten years Philip had been a widower, and during the latter half of that period, as Robert had gathered from Drusilla, he had been a bachelor-at-large, a man neither married nor single. Rumours of at least two love-affairs had filtered through to Robert by way of Drusilla, whose serene acquiescence in such things, now he came to think of it, was painfully consistent with the suspicions he entertained about herself. It was not quite, for Robert, a question of morals, or so he believed. What offended him was that people should set themselves up to be different, independent, a law unto themselves, in defiance of discipline and good order. He could tolerate any opinion, could bring to any piece of pure theory, no matter what its moral implications, the disinterested regard of the artist: this was his title to philosophy and his value as a teacher. But where conduct came in he could not easily forgive a refusal to run with the pack. In a trivial degree even the arrival of a left-handed batsman on the cricket-field, which he sometimes visited with his children, provoked him to mute protest: to see the field change over, in order to accommodate the oddity, was an affront, in its small way, to his veneration of the normal, the central, the approved.

The temptation to seek out Philip, instantly rejected, as instantly returned. The idea of spending an hour or two with Philip in Philip's club, a place as solid and stolid, as comfortable and decorous, as Philip on occasion was not,

powerfully attracted Robert in spite of his dismal preoccupations. An evening, a dinner of Philip's choosing, with a shared bottle of Margaux, perhaps, and a glass or two of the club port; and all this, which was somehow part of the idea of Philip, all this in an atmosphere agreeably masculine, beyond reach of wives and rumours of wives. The food and the wine, sensual amenities which had after all their aesthetic aspects too, were not, mused Robert, important in themselves; but they did undoubtedly provide the perfect accompaniment for Philip and his talk, that easy effortless talk, spiced with a sort of lazy irony, and punctuated by comfortable silences. It was significant, too, of Philip's quality, that one instinctively thought of him as a host, in which capacity he seemed best to enjoy himself and make others enjoy him. What a pity the fellow was Drusilla's brother! And what a pity, a horror, a prodigy too monstrous to be examined, that his being Drusilla's brother was a fact in his disfavour.

Having put the thought of Philip out of mind, on the afternoon of his fourth day in town Robert went to the Museum, and there, in the Reading Room, was Philip in person, eyeing with an abstracted air the tall pile of books on the table before him. At sight of Robert he gave a conspiratorial nod, broke the religious silence by pushing back his chair, and came to speak to him.

"What are *you* doing in town, Robert?"

"Researching," said Robert, in a stage whisper.

Philip grinned, and his eyebrows rose a little. "Has Cambridge destroyed her libraries, then?"

Robert acknowledged the remark with a vague smile. "We can't talk here," he whispered.

"That's true," said Philip. "We mustn't wake 'em, poor



devils! Let's go and have tea somewhere."

While, under the eye of the great glass dome, this whispered conversation was proceeding, the proprietress of an hotel somewhat humbler than the one Robert patronized, and situated a mile or two east of it, was "putting to rights" the bedroom just vacated by one of her regulars, a boisterous commercial gentleman with russet-red eyes and russet-brown teeth. She was doing the work herself, beneath her dignity though perhaps it was, because Bertha (chambermaid, parlourmaid, kitchenmaid) was at the moment fully occupied elsewhere. The next occupant of this bedroom, though neither he nor she was yet aware of the fact, was to be a hale old man with easy friendly manners and a country tang in his speech. It would be a nice change for Mrs Rowlands to have a countryman in the house, and to put him in the way of finding the directories and reference-books he was in need of; for, with all her enforced acquaintance with the dingy and the meretricious, she had not lost her native capacity for distinguishing chalk from cheese. It would be a change, too, for Tom Cordwainer, to live for a day or two amid the bustle of London. After delays artfully contrived, Clara had suddenly changed her mind and her tune, and had packed him off to town with the remark that, whether anything came of his scheme or not, a bit of a change would do him no harm. That was Tom's opinion as well, though he was in no danger of forgetting the prime purpose of this expedition. He, like Robert, was engaged in a piece of research. And to set against his lack of skill as an investigator was the fact that he knew, as Robert did not, the name of the man he was after.

MASTER W. H.

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AFTER leaving Philip, in Museum Street, Robert started walking back to the hotel; and no sooner had he entered Kingsway than he became very conscious of the fact that he was within a stone's throw of the office of Mr Linthorne, of Linthorne and Denby, and half-wished he had a stone ready to throw. No reply, beyond a polite acknowledgement, had been received from that quarter by Robert's solicitors, and the source of Emily's hundred a year was a mystery still to be solved. As he approached Lincoln's Inn Fields, an attack of indecision, the impulse to call on Mr Linthorne being held in check by a conviction of the futility of so doing, caused his pace to slacken. At the same moment he became aware of a figure vaguely familiar walking a few yards ahead of him, the figure of a tall, stooping, lean-faced man, who might have been an undertaker but was in fact Mr Linthorne's chief clerk. As recognition dawned in him Robert's pulse began to quicken with the excitement of a new and somewhat fantastic idea. He could scarcely doubt that this cadaverous fellow was in possession of the information which he Robert desired. Uncertain how to proceed in a matter that promised to be one of infinite delicacy, Robert kept a discreet distance behind his man and followed him into the Strand. He guessed that he must be on his way to

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the Temple underground station, but this conjecture was never confirmed, for instead of crossing to the south side of the street his quarry suddenly disappeared through the swing-doors of a wine bar. After hanging about on the pavement outside for a few seconds of indecision, Robert saluted his lucky star and followed him, in time to observe him settling his buttocks comfortably into the dual-concave seat of a tall stool in front of the bar. Boldly perching himself on the next stool, Robert ordered a dry sherry and waited for his companion to offer a sign of recognition.

It was the man behind the bar, however, who at first did all the talking.

"A nice dry sherry, sir? Certainly, sir. A pleasure." He brought the sherry and received the price. "Thank you, sir." Having retired three paces he suddenly resumed the attack. "Better weather, sir!"

"Yes," agreed Robert.

"You're right, sir," said the publican. "Quite like spring at last, sir."

Robert nodded. But, wishing to attract to himself the attention of his neighbour, he belatedly responded to this over-hearty hospitality by saying: "Still cool in the early morning, though."

"I believe you, sir," said the publican, with impressive emphasis. "I believe you," he repeated, with the air of one who takes glad possession of a new truth. He retired again, to a place discreetly out of hearing, flushed with triumph at having come to terms with a new and difficult customer.

Linthorne's clerk sat silently enjoying his drink. Like Robert, he had chosen a dry sherry. If Linthorne was a benevolent wolf in appearance, his clerk, in Robert's fancy, was on closer acquaintance an urbane rat dressed in sombre

city clothes: stiff white collar, black suit, striped grey trousers. His bowler hat he had placed, with reverent care, on the counter, first mopping that sleek mahogany surface with a silk handkerchief. His hair was thin and greying, his mouth slightly pursed, his nose large and humble. He looked, alas, discreet and incorruptible.

"Good sherry this," remarked Robert, in a confidential undertone.

"Excellent," said the elderly clerk.

He gave Robert a sidelong glance, uncertain whether to admit to having seen him before.

Robert helped him out. "We met the other day, I fancy. You're with Mr Linthorne, aren't you?"

"I am, sir," said his companion, with sad pride. "And I was with his father before him."

"That'll be a long time, I expect?"

"If you call thirty-nine years a long time," said the clerk, "a long time it is."

Robert emptied his glass. "Let's celebrate it," he suggested, with a smile. "I'm going to have another sherry. Won't you join me?"

A little crude, he thought. But perhaps it will serve.

Conversation proceeded in a desultory fashion. After the second glass, his new acquaintance insisted on returning Robert's compliment, and in the slight access of urbanity induced by the third glass Robert was emboldened to mention his little affair.

"Yes, I came to see your Mr Linthorne on a rather delicate matter."

"I remember it perfectly. There's been some correspondence about it since."

"Your lips are sealed, of course," said Robert. "The soul

of discretion," he found himself remarking, a moment later, the sherry being more potent than he knew.

"The confidence that has been reposed in me—" began Mr Linthorne's clerk, with solemn unction. He lapsed into silence. It became evident that the sentence would never be finished. Enough had been said.

"I absolutely agree," declared Robert warmly. "There was some correspondence, I think you were saying?"

"Letters, to and fro," explained Mr Linthorne's clerk.

"Relating to my inquiry, no doubt," said Robert.

"Relating to your inquiry is the very ticket, Mr . . ."

"Cordwainer," said Robert.

"Cordwainer it is," said the clerk.

"Let me see if I've got it right," said Robert. "My people asked your people. . . . We'll have two more sherries, please. . . . My people asked your people, that is your Mr Linthorne, to be so good as to inquire of your client Mr er . . . what did you say his name was?"

"To inquire," said the clerk, "of the party in question whether the party would consent to its name being communicated to Mr Robert Cordwainer, son of Mrs Emily Cordwainer deceased. That was how it went," he said, tapping Robert on the knee, "and that is how it goes. And as one man of the world to another," he continued, after a pregnant interval, "I don't mind telling you, if you'll let it go no further . . . eh?"

"You can rely on me," said Robert, eagerly.

"I don't mind telling you, if you'll let it go no further, that the answer, such as it is, is in the negative."

"You mean he won't let me know who he is?"

"He won't let you know who he is," corroborated the clerk.

"Who won't?" asked Robert.

"The party in question," said the clerk, his lean face rosy with smiles.

"Do you mean W. H.?" asked Robert, affecting extreme surprise.

Smiles vanished from the clerk's face, and the light of alarm shone in his eyes.

"Where did you get that from?"

"Don't worry," said Robert soothingly. "Not from you. But I do happen to know that the first payments came from W. H. Now what, I wonder, do those initials stand for?"

Mr Linthorne's clerk began laughing softly. A most diverting fancy had flashed into his mind. "In point of fact, sir," he remarked delightedly, "they stand for *me*, if you please. Or very nearly so."

"I'm not sure that I understand you," said Robert patiently.

"W. H. equals Walter Hewitt. And Walter Hewitt happens to be my name. Now isn't that a coincidence?"

"Did you say Hewish?" asked Robert. And at sound of his own question a light dawned suddenly in his mind. Was it possible? Why not? And why hadn't he thought of Dr Hewish before? During all these years the solution of his puzzle, if this were indeed the solution, had lain naked under his nose. And perhaps for that very reason he had failed to see it. William Hewish—why not? He remembered now, his mind inflamed with excitement, that Dr Hewish had once had a practice at no great distance from his childhood's home. If Hewish it was—and the idea gained strength with every breath he took—why should Hewish have provided Emily Cordwainer with an income except for the obvious reason? And if Hewish is my father, Drusilla is a

sort of stepsister. No harm in that, he conceded after a moment's thought. But the inference was highly distasteful, none the less.

Mr Linthorne's clerk, whose existence Robert had almost forgotten, remarked that coincidence was a funny thing.

"But it does occur," he said sagaciously. "One can't deny that."

"Very true," agreed Robert. He glanced at the clock. "Time I was getting along."

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## DOMESTIC CONVERSATIONS

THE playroom in Drusilla's house had in some sense grown up with the children to whom it owed its humanity. It was a large bright room, almost square, with a wide window on its south side and a small window on its west. The floor was covered with sky-blue linoleum, and there were four or five rugs for the convenience of people who wanted to sit down. In one corner, where the toy cupboard was, stood Roger the rocking-horse, a dapple-grey animal with fierce nostrils and a commanding eye. He was as old as Margaret and still capable of work, though nowadays he was seldom called upon. A tall brass fire-guard fended the hearth, and the two irons bars across the lower window bore indirect witness to John and Judith's infant propensities, now long outgrown. A framed sixteenth-century map of Cambridge-

shire hung over the fireplace, and elsewhere there were vividly coloured underground-railway posters, unframed. The rest of the wall space provided Judith with a cream-washed ground on which to record her visions and her fancies, and the use she had made of it would have provided the conventional myth-ridden psycho-analyst with ample scope for his ingenuity. Well-stocked bookshelves, and a table for writing at, represented the last stage of the room's transition from nursery to something more in key with the maturity of twelve-year-olds.

On the afternoon of their father's return from London, with a strange new idea burning in his brain, all three were together in the playroom. Margaret, who occupied the basket-chair by the fire, was reading *The Cloister and the Hearth*, for the third time in two years. John lay on the rug in front of her, leaning on his elbows, head propped in hands. He too had a book, and he was reading with a concentration so much intenser than his sister's that she sometimes glanced at him with wonder, curiosity, and a faint rebellious envy. That part of Margaret's mind which was given to her reading was suffused with joy and sadness for the ill-starred love of Gerard and her auburn-haired namesake. The sweet fire of their passion ravished her, but the memory of what was coming, of Gerard in his cloister who must be no more than a brother henceforward to the mother of his child, cast a shadow over the page for her; and being therefore half-reluctant to go on reading she welcomed the distraction of watching Judith, who sat at the table biting the end of her pencil and from time to time adding a page or two to the romantic story she was writing in a series of penny exercise-books. As the novelist leaned over her manuscript she presented to Margaret's view a



round dark head, small shoulders, a downy nape. The curving cheek and the small blunt nose were present only to the eye of memory, being completely hidden by brown bobbed hair that enclosed the face like a pair of blinkers, leaving visible only the round point of the chin.

"There!" exclaimed Judith, with profound satisfaction, dropping her pencil and jumping from her chair. "Shall I read you what I've done, Margaret?"

John, surprisingly, broke off from his reading, to ask: "Must you, Judy?"

"Oh never mind him!" said Judith. Unlike John, who was intensely secretive about his literary labours, Judith was a sociable novelist. It was as much as she could do to refrain from reciting each sentence as she wrote it down; and nothing short of a blunt refusal to listen could have prevented her reading the latest chapter to someone.

"Try it on Annie," advised John, with brutal humour. "She's *paid* to put up with us, poor woman!"

"Are you ready, Margaret?" said Judith urgently. "Never mind what Old Piggy says!"

"There speaks my courteous sister," said John, with the elderly urbanity which it sometimes amused him to affect. "We are all ears, child. You may proceed."

Judith was so goodnatured that nobody minded being bored by her literary performances. It was not always possible to enjoy them, but it was impossible not to enjoy her enjoyment. Her fits of literary enthusiasm were sudden and brief; while they lasted they had for her the charm of novelty, but her satisfaction in the results was only skin-deep. Once the mood had passed she took no care to preserve her manuscripts, though, for the sake of the drawings with which she idly illustrated them, others did.

"D'you remember where we left off?" she asked Margaret, settling down on the rug and turning her pages importantly. "Mr Devereux has locked Winifred in her bedroom, because she wants to marry the young postman. At least he doesn't know that she wants to marry the postman. But he wants her to marry the Duke of Trumpington, and she says she won't. So he locks her in her bedroom."

"What, again?" asked John.

"The Duke is very handsome and wicked," continued Judith imperturbably. "And much older than Winifred of course." She laughed with excited pleasure. "It's awfully good, this chapter. Now I'll begin. At that moment there was a knock at the door. Come in, my dear Trumpington, said Mr Devereux. I have locked the little hussy in her bedroom. Let us have a glass or two of whisky, and I am sure she will come to her senses in time. I see your point, Devereux, answered the Duke with a dry laugh. Quite so, rejoined Mr Devereux gratefully, and I cannot tell you how aggravated I am, your grace, that any daughter of mine should so far forget her obedience. Say no more, interrupted the Duke courteously, the baggage is shy I daresay, but we will soon put that right, he remarked nonchalantly, twirling his moustache with jewelled fingers and giving a rather sinister smile. So after they had drunk some whisky and soda water Mr Devereux said I feel a lot better for that and now I will go and fetch the little filly. She will trot well enough in double harness, I'll wager, with anyone who knows how to handle her. Trust me, leered the Duke, flinging his empty glass into the fireplace with a light gesture, where it broke into a thousand pieces. I will love her like anything, Devereux, you may bet your life on that, once she is mine. So Mr Devereux ran upstairs and tapped

on Winifred's door and said You can come out now, my dear, there's a gentleman to see you. So Winifred came downstairs and the Duke said Good morning fair lady. Then he went down on one knee and kissed her hand and said Be mine sweet maid and let who can be clever, for he was quite fond of poetry. I cannot be yours, answered Winifred, you are too old for me, she exclaimed passionately. It is true I shall never see thirty again, muttered the Duke, with a smothered oath, but I am very rich and so were my ancestors and life with me as my duchess will be one grand sweet song, you will soon see. As you are fond of poetry, rejoined Winifred, trying to change the conversation, you can write a piece in my album before you go. But hark, I hear the postman's knock. A loud rat-a-tat-tat proved the truth of her words, and the Duke jumped to his feet hastily. . . . End of Chapter Three."

No one ever hesitated to laugh at Judith's effusions, and Judith herself never failed to join in the laughter. Margaret could not decide what proportion of conscious humour mingled with the fundamental seriousness which the child brought to her task. Before the laughter had died down, and while the rat-a-tat-tat of Winifred's lover was still sounding in the ear of fancy, Robert, drawn from his study by a similar but actual sound, went into the hall and took the afternoon letters, just delivered, out of the box. There were two for himself and one for Drusilla. This last bore in its postmark a name that excited his attention, the name of the small provincial town in which Lucian Print had lived his last years. The address was typed, and on the flap of the envelope, stamped in blind, was an oval device embodying the name and address of its origin. Robert stared, and wondered, and went slowly in search of Drusilla, whom

he found taking her ease on a settee in the drawing-room. At luncheon she had complained of a headache.

"Here's a letter for you," he said. "Shall I open it?"

He tried to give the suggestion a casual and ordinary air, but it was in fact a very unusual one, and even had it been otherwise she must have perceived that he was labouring under a strong excitement.

"Don't trouble," she said, holding out her hand for the letter. "My headache's quite gone."

While she read the letter he watched her closely, and made no secret of doing so. He waited, pointedly.

She was on her guard, but though she was adept in learning and acting a part it was not always within her power to invent one in a dire emergency. The letter was surprising, and worse. She feigned surprise, but the surprise she feigned was not the surprise she felt: it was a polite tribute to a gross disaster. Moving slowly, thinking with feverish haste, she folded the letter and returned it to its envelope, painfully conscious all the while of Robert's fixed scrutiny. The phrases of the letter grew enormous in her memory. We have to inform you that, subject to probate, you are a beneficiary under the will of our client the late Mr Lucian Abernethy Print. . . . In the circumstances we think it best to quote the relevant passage from the will. . . . In token of admiration I give and bequeath unto Drusilla Moore actress only daughter of Eleanor Hewish of Kewbury Strand in the County of London formerly Eleanor Moore the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds free of legacy duty which sum I entreat her of her charity to accept in a forgiving spirit.

She felt Robert's stare, which, sooner or later, she must meet. He was waiting, suspicious and implacable. She

guessed that he had noticed the postmark. Was it possible that he had steamed open the letter? In loyalty to Robert she instantly rejected this fantastic notion.

Gaining time, she asked: "When did this come?"

"A moment ago," said Robert.

With an air of weariness she shut her eyes; then suddenly opened them, wide and smiling, to look at Robert.

"You find your letter amusing?" Robert asked curtly.

"Not awfully, darling. I think I shall rest a little longer, after all. My headache seems to have come back."

"I fancied it would," remarked Robert. "Did your dear friend Lucian Print leave a dying message for you?"

Her fingers still grasping the letter she raised her head from the cushions and sat up, languidly stretching herself. Age had not greatly impaired the natural grace of her movements, but that was vanished which had once ravished the heart out of Robert. Her complexion was still good, and the curve of her cheek soft, but the bloom of high summer, which Robert had once found in her, was now a bitter memory.

"How clever of you to guess, Robert!" Her fear of him was changing to anger, anger that he must make it so difficult for her to save him from the pain he was seeking. "Or perhaps you've read my letter. Have you?"

"All I've read is the postmark. You're entitled to say, if you like, that it's no business of mine. But I shan't agree with you."

Drusilla laughed shortly. "My dear Robert, I don't feel it's even *my* business, let alone yours. As a matter of fact, it is about Lucian Print. The extraordinary man has left me some money in his will! Did you ever hear of anything so preposterous!"

"I congratulate you," said Robert icily. "No doubt he had his reasons."

"In token of admiration: that's the reason they give."

"Very pretty," said Robert. "Perhaps you will now be good enough to give me the other reasons. You can rest assured," he added bitterly, "that I shan't let them go any further."

She made a last gallant effort. "Robert, you're doing your best to be very stupid about this. And, what's more, very insulting."

"Indeed?"

Meeting irony with irony she said: "It can hardly have escaped your memory, my dear, that I was once on the stage, a rather conspicuous public figure."

"A public woman," he interpolated, with an ugly smile.

She stared at him in sheer wonder. "Haven't you the wit to understand that hundreds of men, thousands, have had the opportunity of admiring my face and knowing my name? Thousands of them. People I've never seen or heard of. Am I to blame for their sentimentalities? Am I to be put in the pillory because some silly infatuated old man chooses to leave me money?"

"Lucian Print in fact," remarked Robert, in a voice suddenly smooth and dangerous. "Had you never heard the name before?"

She faltered, fearing a trap. "Whether I had heard of him before or not makes no difference. He may have pestered me with flowers or foolish letters at some time or other. How can I remember? I'm an old woman now. And he's a dead old man. Why can't we let it rest?"

"You told me, a fortnight ago," said Robert, "that the

name was utterly unknown to you. That was a lie, wasn't it?"

She made a gesture of impatient despair. "As you please."

"Yes, you lied to me. And now you're trying to slip out of it. He *may* have sent you flowers. He *may* have written you foolish letters. Not knowing how much I've found out, you've decided that it's unsafe to deny all knowledge. Well and good. But why did you deny it before?"

"Because I didn't remember."

"And now you do remember? Is that it?"

"I remember . . . something."

"*What* do you remember?"

"Robert, I will *not* be put in the dock like this. What right have you to probe and pry into my life? No one has such a right, not even my husband. I have done nothing to deserve this odious catechism, and you're making me ashamed of you."

"Ah yes," answered Robert, with hatred and self-hatred in his smile. "But you forget, Drusilla. I was never a gentleman. I'm the son of a poor villager, who kept a dingy little shop. You do right to be ashamed of me."

"You're my husband," she proudly reminded him, "and you were once my lover. You're the father of my children, and you're going out of your way to make me wish it were not so."

Robert paced the room. "It may interest you to know," he said, coming suddenly to a halt, "that your name was on his lips when he lay on the roadside virtually dying. He called you Drusilla. Not Drusilla Moore. Drusilla."

Drusilla moved to the door. "I think this conversation has lasted long enough."

"The best way to make an end of it," retorted Robert, placing himself in her path, "is to show me that letter."

She handed him the letter without a word, and groped her way, dazedly, to a seat.

"Which he entreats her of her charity to accept in a forgiving spirit," recited Robert. In spite of its import he was momentarily appeased by possession of the letter: had she not angered him by withholding it, the interview might have taken a different turn. He came and stood before her where she sat trembling, her force spent. With unexpected gentleness he asked her: "What had you to forgive him, Drusilla?"

Instantly responsive to his change of manner she answered slowly: "When I was a young girl, a mere child, he persecuted me with his attentions. It was very disagreeable, and my mother had to forbid him the house."

"And is that all?" asked Robert.

She bowed her head, assenting.

After a silence that seemed infinite to her waiting heart he spoke again, and with the same dispirited gentleness.

"I'm sorry, Drusilla, but I can't and don't believe you. I can't forget that you are an actress. You're acting now, very skilfully, very convincingly. It's all just like life. But it's not life: it's lies. I don't believe what you say. That is, I don't believe it's the whole truth. Shall I tell you what I do believe, Drusilla?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "If it pleases you, Robert."

"I believe that Lucian Print was your lover. Before I married you. Yes, and perhaps after." A fanatical gleam showed in his eye. "And I believe he was the father of your daughter Margaret."

Flushing crimson, and blanching as quickly, she rose



and faced him with a new horror in her eyes. "But, Robert," she said, almost pleadingly, "that's simply not sane."

He smiled sadly upon her, and went abruptly from the room.

Drusilla stared after him, stared at the shut door and listened to the deadly stillness that was now in the room. Against the background of that stillness her own words were written, utterance of her shocked thought. If he believed what he had said, he was no longer sane. And if he had said it merely to hurt her, still less was he sane. She stood rigid in the grip of this horror, remembering how strangely he had smiled, and with what malice, with what sleekness, with ultimately what mournful despair he had spoken. The seed of an unimaginable terror was in her heart. She thought of her children, young, artless, full of sublime trust. She remembered that there was no telephone in the house.

Going stealthily into the hall she listened, and waited, and listened again. At last, having satisfied herself that Robert was not within hearing, she went in search of Margaret, whom she found in the playroom.

Margaret, released from Judith's importunities, had returned to her book; and Judith, not content with her recent triumph, was adding a further chapter to the story of Winifred Devereux and the elderly Trumpington. John was no longer in the room.

"Margaret, I want you a moment." But where was John? "Where's John?" asked Drusilla sharply. "I thought he was with you."

"I think he's in the garden, mother. Shall I fetch him?"

"We'll fetch him together, darling."

Behind Judith's back she beckoned Margaret, and with a raised finger enjoined secrecy.

Margaret rose at once and came to her.

"I want you to run along to Mrs Seagrave's," said Drusilla, when the door was shut on Judith, "and ask if you may use her telephone. Put a call through to Grandpa. Do you remember the number? Look, I'll write it down for you."

"What am I to say to Grandpa, mother?"

"Say, will he please come to dinner, and of course stay the night."

"Today? How lovely. I do hope he comes."

"Yes, darling. But listen. Tell him it's desperately important, and that I'm very anxious. Do you understand?"

Margaret nodded, grave-eyed. After the briefest pause she said: "Is it about Father?"

"Why do you ask that, child?"

"Oh . . . I don't know. I thought perhaps . . ."

"Yes," said Drusilla, touching the girl's hand. "Now run along. And nobody's to know except us two."

Margaret smiled reassurance. "I'll be as quick as I can, darling." She kissed her mother's cheek. "I'm nearly as tall as you now," she remarked, apropos of nothing; and without waiting to change her shoes she hurried away on her errand.

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## DR HEWISH GROWS ANXIOUS

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SINCE his second and final retirement from practice, ten years ago, at the age of sixty-nine, Dr Hewish had lived in

a small house at Hampstead, where he was attended, very faithfully, by a middle-aged couple, George and Martha Powell. These excellent servants, with the precision and good sense which their subsequent behaviour was consistently to illustrate, had described themselves in their advertisement as Man and Cook. Man and Cook had desired situation with gentleman; Dr Hewish had desired the services of Man and Cook; the bargain was struck, and no one of the three had had occasion to regret it. The house overlooked a corner of the Heath, and at the back was a small garden, where, in the intervals of reading and browsing, a man might grow roses and keep bees. In this long autumn of his days the doctor lived a life of well-filled leisure. He looked back very often, forward very seldom. He was sometimes conscious of tiredness, never of boredom. It pleased him to be within easy reach of town, where, at his club, he spent two or three days of each week. His age was now something to boast about, but he himself took it, as he took every natural manifestation, for granted. That he was a very old gentleman could not be gainsaid, but he did not think of himself in any such terms, did not think himself a remarkable or pathetic figure, and was serenely unaware that his stepson Philip, a fellow clubman, regarded him with wonder and compassion, as well as with affection: wonder because he had lived so long and remained so hale, compassion because he must so soon die. Dr Hewish did not look at death: death cannot be looked at. But he knew, with stoical resignation, that it was there, waiting for him, somewhere round the corner. Meanwhile he was alive, and life was very pleasant. He was a lonely survivor of his generation, but he had as many friends and acquaintances as he had energy to enjoy; and it was his habit, when he wanted

to taste again the deep complex pleasure of seeing Drusilla and her children, to send a telegram to say he was coming, and ask George to pack a suitcase, "the smaller one, George, not the big fellow," he always said, forgetting that he had always said it before. He had never ceased to be grateful, to his pagan gods, that what he had sometimes feared for Drusilla had never happened, and that a secret of which he was sole custodian would die with him.

Several times today the thought of Drusilla and her family had flashed in and out of his mind, and during the three-mile walk that he took after tea it showed a curious disposition to linger with him. This meant no more, he supposed, than that it was time he went to see them again. Daylight was failing by the time he got back to the house, and by then, too, a hundred and one stray images had crowded Drusilla from his mind. On his entry George Powell so promptly appeared that his master divined at once that he had been watching for him. He gave the fellow, for his pains, a blank stare, as much as to say: Confound your maternal impudence. But a gleam of humour showed through the stare, and neither the one nor the other was lost on George. Master and man understood each other very well.

"There was a telephone message, sir, from Miss Margaret."

"Where was she speaking from?"

"From her home, sir. She says will you please go to dinner tonight, sir."

"How the devil can I go anywhere tonight, George? What's the girl dreaming about!"

"I couldn't say, sir. But she said something about her mother, sir, and being anxious."

"H'm!" The doctor had been feeling tired. Now his tiredness was suddenly gone. "Get me a time-table."

"Yes, sir. There's a train at eight twenty-two from Liverpool Street, sir, arriving nine forty-five."

"Is that the best I can do?"

"You could catch that nicely, sir," said George, "after taking a light meal."

"Have you packed my case?"

"Yes, sir," said George. "Cook has prepared a little something which she hopes you may fancy."

"Very likely, George. But I can't stop for it."

"It's ready, sir, whenever you are," said George blandly. "There's a full half hour, sir, before the cab arrives."

In the end, after more argument and a scrutiny of the time-table, George had his way: less by force of his bland obstinacy, for the doctor was his match in that, than because on examination it was seen to be the best way. A telegram was despatched to Drusilla, and Dr Hewish, suspending anxiety in the interests of digestion, ate a little fish, drank a little wine, and went on his way to Cambridge. By philosophy and training he was disposed to keep his head in a crisis, and he was in no danger of failing to do so now. But with advancing years, and especially where Drusilla was concerned, he sometimes found himself a prey to nervous fears; and tonight, sitting in the train, with nothing else to occupy him but a newspaper in which he had no interest, he was tempted to let those fears have their way with him. Something about her mother, and being anxious. Who was anxious—Margaret herself or Drusilla? In Drusilla's apparent happiness with her husband and children Dr Hewish's dearest wish had been satisfied, against all probability. That her happiness depended on a fiction did not in the least

dismay him, so long as the fiction could be sustained, as it well might be until the end of time. He alone knew her situation for the fantastic thing it was, unless . . . unless . . . unless this talk of anxiety should prove to mean that some untimely truth was being dragged into the light. He wished the train would move faster, spent himself in wishing, and arrived in a state of trembling weakness from which the sight of Drusilla herself, waiting on the platform, hardly restored him.

"It was good of you to come, darling," said Drusilla.

How like her mother she was! Yet unlike her, too. "How are you, my dear?" he asked. Once more in control of himself he gave her the smile that she knew so well: a smile that was like an urbane aphorism, and the quintessence of himself.

"We'll talk outside," said Drusilla. "I've brought the car in."

She seized his suitcase and he followed her out of the station.

"Well?"

"It's Robert," she said. "He's gone very strange."

"Ah!" His imagination took heat. The suspense was intolerable. "What has happened?" he said testily.

"Do you remember Lucian Print, I wonder?"

No, he could not recall any such name. Drusilla enlightened him. So that was it! Anxiety became an agony. But as she unfolded her story his mind grew quieter; relief, like new life, ran in his veins; and the cheerfulness of his answers almost affronted Drusilla.

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## THE INQUEST OPENS

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ROBERT had been informed of Dr Hewish's impending arrival. He had received the news politely, but without comment. By happy chance Owen Seagrave had looked in to spend the evening with him, and Robert's behaviour to his old friend had been so normal that Drusilla began to hope that her fears had been premature, hysterical. With herself he was civil and silent, betraying nothing of his secret sardonic amusement that Dr Hewish, the W. H. of his arduous researches, should so promptly, so unwittingly, present himself for trial. Margaret was glad for her mother's sake that Grandpa, as they called him, was coming; and the two younger children were glad for their own sakes, and vociferous in their disappointment that he could not arrive till they were in bed. With children Dr Hewish was genial without heartiness, and on occasions when he felt no interest in them and their concerns he pretended to none. For this reason they were at ease with him, recognizing a candour akin to their own. But Margaret, for herself, felt the need of another and a younger ally. The fear that haunted her had neither face nor form; it tainted the air she breathed, like a pervasive poison; it shone in her father's cold, inquisitive, appraising glances. These glances, she knew, were for her, and her alone: in some way which she

did not understand, and dared not guess at, she was intimately involved in the mystery that lived in this house. She could not confide this vagueness to her mother; nor could she force her mother's further confidence. As the hours went by she grew more and more aware of her aloneness, and at last, in secret, she wrote and posted a letter to her uncle, Philip Moore. It was her conviction that Drusilla had been very lucky to have Philip for her brother, and Drusilla, had she been told of the sentiment, would have agreed with it.

The next day passed without event. Robert had his bombshell ready, but it pleased him to stay his hand awhile, pleased him to have the old gentleman an unsuspecting guest in the house, pleased him to wait and watch, under cover of urbane conversation, knowing that at any moment he could shatter that aged complacency with one skilfully chosen sentence. The knowledge filled him with power and a cumulative anger. Not till the afternoon of the following day did he gather himself together for the great exposure.

The family luncheon was proceeding amiably to its conclusion.

"Shall we take our coffee in the drawing-room?" he blandly suggested, embracing Drusilla and her stepfather in his look. "I've something to tell you, doctor. And something to ask you. You children can amuse yourselves in the playroom." He glanced at Margaret. "Yes, you too, Margaret."

Discomfited by his peremptoriness the children filed out of the room, and their three elders, without looking at each other, rose from the table. The two men went straight to the drawing-room, where Drusilla, having given instructions to Annie, joined them in a moment.

The pallor and rigidity of Robert's face told her that the



long-expected crisis was at hand.

Robert, indeed, was now in a cold frenzy of impatience, utterly intent on his resolve to tear the truth from these two at whatever cost to them or himself. His impatience was a torture: he had waited too long.

"Dr Hewish," he said suddenly, "have I the honour to be your son?"

The doctor was prepared for stranger questions, but not for this one. "I don't understand you, my boy."

"I'm sorry my question isn't plain enough. Let me try again. Are you my father? Did you beget me upon the body of my mother, the late Emily Cordwainer?"

Dr Hewish shook his head sorrowfully. "No, no, my dear Robert. You're talking nonsense. What put such an idea into your head?"

Robert smiled, and the doctor could no longer doubt that there was madness in him. "Were you my mother's lover?"

"If you want a categorical answer, no, I was not. She wasn't that kind of woman. Your mother was a good wife to her husband. Surely you know that?"

"Always?" asked Robert.

"Always," said the doctor firmly.

Robert smiled again, a smile of triumph. "You did know my mother then?"

"Slightly, slightly." Dr Hewish perceived, too late, that he was trapped. "I was her doctor for a while."

"Indeed? You were her doctor?"

"Her doctor, and nothing more."

"Was that why you paid her, through your solicitors, an income of a hundred a year?"

Dr Hewish's face betrayed him. "All this is pure fan-

tasy, Robert. The fantasy of a jealous mind." But his words carried no conviction. Even for himself they had a hollow sound.

"Jealous?" echoed Robert, wonderingly. "Ah!" He smiled; he pounced. "So Drusilla has been confiding in you, has she? We'll come to that presently."

"Meanwhile," remarked Drusilla, with bitter humour, "here is Annie with the coffee. Would you like to take her into your confidence as well, Robert?"

Robert gave no sign of having heard the remark. He waited, with lowered head, till Annie had entered and withdrawn.

"If you are my father," he said, fixing Dr Hewish with his stare, "why do you disown me? If you are not my father, why did you provide my mother with the means of educating me?"

"I have nothing more to say on that head," answered the doctor.

"Yet you will hardly deny that I have a right to concern myself with this question. Let me tell you this. Not for very many years, as Drusilla herself will tell you, have I believed Tom Cordwainer to be my father. And what I have recently discovered makes it very plain that I was right. What puzzles me is that you deny it. What infuriates me is that you have concealed it all my life. Are you so hidebound by convention? Couldn't you trust your son with the secret of his own identity? You seduced my mother, yes. But, well, who am I to blame you for that? For all I know she was happy with you, as she certainly wasn't with my reputed father. And you didn't behave so badly, as these things go. You made her some sort of provision—more, I daresay, than you were obliged to. You had enough sense of justice to

see that I had decent schooling. I'm not forgetting that: don't think it. But why this concealment and evasion? Why, when I claim you as my father, do you pretend to think me insane? Drusilla, after all, is only your stepdaughter. Your stepdaughter and your son's wife. Awkward. Uncomfortable. Not a thing to shout from the housetops. But there's no terrible harm in it. There's no blood relationship, is there?"

Dr Hewish sat with bowed head. He looked up to say, with hasty emphasis: "No, no. Nothing of that kind." Realizing that that, too, might seem to imply an admission, he added, with a calm and friendly reasonableness: "If I were your father, Robert, I should be proud to admit the fact. The simple truth is that I am not your father."

"Then why did you provide my mother with an income?" He waited in vain for an answer. "If you must lie, sir, you might at least lie with some show of plausibility. Is it your habit to provide incomes for all and sundry?"

"I can say only this, Robert. For anything I did or didn't do, I had good reasons. I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"And your reasons?"

"My reasons were my own business. They must remain so."

"Then you do now admit that you gave my mother money?"

"I admit nothing," retorted Dr Hewish.

"Thank you. I draw my own conclusions."

Robert, for the first time during this conversation, spared a glance for Drusilla, who sat listening with blank face, utterly wearied and bewildered. It was mercifully no longer possible to believe in her husband's madness, and her step-

father's answers puzzled her almost as much as did the questions that provoked them. She would not believe him capable of infidelity to her mother at the very time of his courting her, but that there was no substance at all in Robert's accusations was more than she could maintain. It was clear beyond question—everything pointed to it—that Dr Hewish knew more of Robert's mother than he had ever admitted to Robert's wife or would admit to Robert himself. Unlike her husband she had no stomach for detective work, but she longed for a few minutes alone with her stepfather, that these baffling confusions might be resolved for her.

"Now," said Robert, "we come to the second item on my agenda. A moment ago, sir, you called me jealous. When did you last see Mr Lucian Print?"

"To the best of my knowledge I have never seen him."

"You have, however, heard of him?"

"I have this moment heard of him, from you."

"And previously from my wife, I think?" suggested Robert. He intercepted a glance between the other two. "Would you like to retire," he said suavely, "and decide between you how much to admit? It appears that you are both equally bent on fooling me."

Drusilla intervened. She had taken a sudden resolution. "Robert, listen to me. I will tell you all I know about Lucian Print. Then I pray God you'll be satisfied and let the thing rest."

"I am listening," said Robert.

"Forgive me, my dear!" Dr Hewish was on his feet. He gazed intently at Drusilla, with warning in his eyes. "I think it is very unnecessary for you to say anything at all."

"Darling, this is between Robert and me. I *must* tell him.

He'll hate it, I know. But if I don't tell him he'll hate *me*. And what's the use of that? There are the children to think of."

"Drusilla, I entreat you—"

"I am waiting, Drusilla," said Robert.

Dr Hewish, with a gesture of helplessness, sank back into his chair. Drusilla, intent on her purpose, saw nothing but Robert, her lover, her husband, the father of her children.

"Lucian Print," she said slowly, "was a young man when I was a child. He was a friend of my parents, and was always in and out of the house. After my father died, and even before, he was a sort of uncle to Philip and me. We called him Uncle Lucy. Mother trusted him implicitly. There seemed no reason why she shouldn't. One day, one summer's afternoon, when I was in my thirteenth year, he took me for a walk in Wilbury Woods. We'd often been there together before, but Philip had generally been with us. This time it was different. We were alone. He began fondling me. I thought it was silly and queer of him, but I thought no harm. You must remember that I was a child, and grossly ignorant. Do you want to know any more, Robert?"

"I want to know everything."

"He tricked me into lying down. He forced me."

"Forced you?"

"In plain terms, he raped me."

There was silence.

"Is that all?" asked Robert in a hard voice.

"Isn't it enough?"

"I want to know everything," said Robert implacably. "I'm sorry to distress you, Drusilla." His voice was that of a courteous stranger. "But this story is seventeen years over-

due. I want to know everything."

"You are being ridiculous, both of you!" cried Dr Hewish passionately. "You have said and heard quite enough. For God's sake, Drusilla, let it alone."

"He wants to know everything," said Drusilla. Her voice was now as hard as Robert's own. "Didn't you hear him say so? He wants the whole story, and he shall have it. Nine months after being raped, my dear Robert, I gave birth to a child."

"A dead child," said Dr Hewish quickly.

Robert turned on him in a fury. "What the hell do you know about it?"

Dr Hewish shrugged his shoulders. "You forget, my friend. I am a medical man. It fell to me to deliver the child." He met Robert's stare with a deprecating mildness. "I was not her stepfather then," he said gently. "Only her doctor, do you see?"

"You tell me the child was born dead," said Robert, looking quickly from one face to the other.

"The child was born dead," said Dr Hewish.

Robert said slowly: "I am not sure that I believe you. Why were you so eager with the information?"

While Dr Hewish groped for an answer there came a tap on the door. Annie appeared.

"There's a gentleman to see you, sir."

"We can't see anyone now, Annie. Make some excuse, whoever he is. Say Mr Cordwainer is resting."

"If you please, madam, the gentleman says he is Mr Cordwainer's father."

"My father!" said Robert. "Ah yes, my illustrious namesake. He comes very opportunely. Show him in here, Annie. At once."

## WITNESS FOR THE DEFENCE

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IT WAS Tom Cordwainer's goodhumoured boast, which events had more than once justified, that he knew when he was on to a good thing. He was accustomed to declare, on these occasions, that he felt a prickling about the shoulders, and his mother had told him as a child that that meant he would soon grow wings. His wings were still lacking, but it was not to be denied, and he would have been the last to deny it, that his fancy, after a false start or two, had generally led him to the skirts of happy chance. He had recognized the goodness of Clara Jones, and that goodness was now the staple fact of his existence. He had touched lucky in most of his business dealings, and it was through no fault of his that *The Coach and Six* was not yielding quite enough for the support of himself, his wife, and his sadly ill-used daughter and her brat. And now, his instinct told him, he was on to another good thing, the remedy for all present ills, in the shape of Dr Hewish, whose open-handed generosity was something he was glad to remember. Not that the generosity had been all on the doctor's side. By no means. Tom, too, had played fair, had stuck to his part of the bargain like the good fellow he believed himself to be and on the whole was. But the doctor, no denying, had a very shrewd sense of justice; and since Emily had no

further need of her allowance, nor Robert neither, he would be ready enough, with perhaps a little persuasion, to see the logic of opening his well-filled purse for the benefit of the surviving spouse. Arrived in London, Tom found, and without the smallest surprise, that everything was to run as smoothly and as easily as shelling peas. The doctor's name was in the telephone directory, plain to see. And though it chanced that the doctor was away from home when he called, he had experienced very small difficulty in coaxing his whereabouts out of George Powell. His name alone, Cordwainer, had acted like a charm. Cordwainer was the name he gave, the alias of Jones being no longer to the purpose. And here at last he was, confident of his welcome, and by no means averse to seeing young Robert again, to say nothing of the fancy piece—an actress they said she was—that young Robert had married.

Confident of his welcome he was. Such confidence, so characteristic of him, was perhaps in large measure the secret of his popularity. But he was hardly prepared for so warm a welcome as in fact he received from Robert.

"Come in, come in," said Robert. "You're just the man I wanted to see."

They shook hands, taking careful stock of each other. A slow grin dawned in Tom's weatherbeaten face. "I don't know as I should have recognized you," he confided.

"Well, no, perhaps not," said Robert. Drusilla shuddered at sight of his unnatural geniality. "I don't know that I should have recognized you, if it comes to that." He laughed. "There's been time for us both to change, hasn't there? Twenty-five years is it? Rather more, I fancy."

Tom's grin grew a trifle sheepish. "I reckon you're not going to throw that up against me." He sketched a bow to



the lady, and waited shyly to be presented.

"Not in the least," agreed Robert. "Let me introduce you. My wife. My father-in-law."

Tom bowed again, not presuming, however, to offer his hand. "Dr Hewish and me have met before. Truth is, Mr Robert, it's him I came to see, as the saying is."

"Indeed?" said Robert. "Well, you couldn't have come at a better time. We've had a very merry afternoon, we three. And you make the picture complete." He gave Tom a shrewd smiling look. "The maid, by the way, announced you as Mr Cordwainer's father. That is, *my* father."

"Well, ain't I?" asked Tom, not knowing what to make of the remark.

"You know best," said Robert. "Come! Between ourselves. *Are* you my father?"

Dr Hewish stepped suddenly between them. "Excuse me, Tom. Upon my word we never expected to see you again. Robert, I owe you a profound apology. I hardly expect you to forgive me. The truth is . . . yes, my boy, I am your father. And this good fellow here is a very generous and long-suffering man."

"You are my father?" echoed Robert. The belated confession took him by surprise, and for the first time he began to doubt the theory he had laboured to establish. The man had lied before. Perhaps he was still lying. To Robert's inflamed sense the world seemed full of people conspiring to deceive him. He could believe nothing, except what was denied.

"Don't ask me why I concealed it, why I denied it," pleaded Dr Hewish. "It's all very painful to me. You don't need telling that. I know Drusilla will never forgive me."

Anger and anguish, scorn and compassion, struggled to-

gether in Drusilla's heart. Dr Hewish dared not look at her. And she could not bring herself to look at him.

"I think perhaps you are right in that," she remarked. "Some things can't be forgiven."

Tom, watching her with friendly compassion, saw that she was on the point of tears. The idea moved him to indignation.

"Well, doctor," said he, "you know your own business best. But that's a funny sort of joke to play."

"Joke?" Robert pounced on the word. "Is Dr Hewish not my father then?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. It was not, the gesture said, for him to interfere. "If he's your father, sir, my Emily wasn't your mother."

"And was your Emily my mother?"

"Of course she was," Dr Hewish cried angrily. "Who should know better than I?"

"Her husband," retorted Robert quickly. "I am asking *you*, Mr Cordwainer. Surely to God it's a simple question. Was your wife Emily my mother, or was she not?"

"Well, as a matter of fact—" began Tom.

"Cordwainer, be quiet. You don't know what you're doing, man. Be quiet, I say."

"He knows very well what he's doing. He's answering my question. Now!"

Anxious though he was to stand well with the doctor Tom could not for the life of him refuse to see that Robert had a right to be answered.

"Surely there's no harm in him knowing, doctor, at this time of day?" he urged apologetically. "He's not a child. He can keep his mouth shut. Nothing I say will go further than these four walls, I take it?"

"Are you telling me," said Robert, grimly patient, "that I am a foundling? You are not my father. Your wife was not my mother. Is that it?"

"You've said it, not me," muttered Tom, in great discomfort.

"I see. That's very interesting. That's more than interesting. I'm nobody's child. Or am I not? Does the other theory now hold the field? It's you I'm asking," he said loudly, grasping Tom's arm. "You're the only one I can get sense or truth out of. Tell me. Is *he* my father, as he says?"

"Now lookee here, boy," said Tom earnestly. "I can't have you thinking ill of the doctor, no matter what he says. He's no more your father than I am, if you ask me. Or at all odds he didn't get you by Emily, see? If you want to know how we came by you, Emily and me, it was this way. The doctor brought you round in his own carriage. A newborn babe you was, fresh as a daisy. Emily, she'd just lost hers. Dead and before its time, poor soul. Time and again she'd miscarried, Emily had, if the lady here will excuse plain speaking. Don't you believe ill of the doctor, my boy. He did Emily a good turn that day. And never let her want for anything afterwards. There she was, in full milk as you might say, and crying her poor eyes out. And along comes the doctor with a liddle new baby. Wrapped up it was, and hidden away in a basket."

Robert sat down, burying his face in his hands. He wanted but one piece to make the pattern complete. Till he found it he must think and think. The same pieces kept offering themselves to his hand. Drusilla raped. Drusilla big with child at the age of thirteen. Emily miscarrying. Arrival of Dr Hewish, very discreet, with a newborn baby

and a hundred a year to wrap it up in. Thirteen. The key-word was thirteen. But Drusilla's child had been born dead. Hadn't it? They said so.

He uncovered his face, looked up. Everyone was staring at him, waiting. Waiting for what? He put his hands on the arms of his chair and slowly rose, staring at the wall as though he saw writing on it. He strode to where Dr Hewish sat crouched; stood over him; eyed him with menace.

"Answer me this. Where did you get me from that day?"

Dr Hewish threw up his hands. His face, in a few moments, seemed to have become small, frightened, pitiful. "I'm a very old man, Robert. Must you torture me!"

"I'll have the truth, you old fox!"

"Do what you please with me, boy. I'll say nothing more."

"Will you not? Will you not?" Robert's voice rose to a scream. After a pause he spoke again, more quietly. And his quietness was more terrible than his noise. "The child that Drusilla had, early in her fourteenth year. You delivered her of it, didn't you? You said so, I think?"

A gentle hand touched Robert's arm. "Yes, darling. But why worry about that now?"

He turned to face his wife. "Is it possible you don't understand, Drusilla? Is it possible you're innocent—of this?"

"She knows nothing, Robert," cried Dr Hewish. "She knows nothing."

"Ah, she knows nothing, does she, my clever doctor! She thinks that child of hers was stillborn, does she, doctor!" An unnatural smile twisted his face. "Drusilla, I've just had the oddest, the prettiest idea. You were thirteen years old when your child was born. And by a touching coincidence you are thirteen years older than your husband."

She stared, gasped, looked for help to her stepfather. And in those aged suffering eyes she read her doom.

Robert stood quiet and still, as though lost in thought. For a moment a curious calm had taken possession of him. He looked steadily into the fantastic face of his situation, examined it in all its parts, assembled the pieces and reassembled them, fitting each into its place, like a child going over its sum and getting always the same answer. He wrought within himself that he might understand. He was subtle in his own destruction. This and this had happened, and to himself.

Drusilla had fallen into her stepfather's arms. "Dear child! Dear child! Don't cry, my pet!" Over her sunken head he addressed himself to Robert. "Robert, think! You're a man, a reasonable man. Does it matter so much? Don't you see it's all unreal, artificial? You are man and woman, you and she. The rest is unimportant. You have children, beautiful children. They justify everything. They make everything right and good. Don't you see, Robert? Don't you see, my boy?"

Robert laughed, loud and long. The peals of his laughter shook the room. But, almost as suddenly as it had started, the noise dwindled to its end.

"Do you hear him, my friend?" he demanded, with smiling agony. Tom Cordwainer was his chosen audience: Tom Cordwainer who had fallen back into a chair and sat stupefied by the scene he witnessed. "Do you hear what the doctor says, old foster-father? The dear doctor. The dear clever doctor. I find I'm the son of a greasy lecher. Does it matter? asks the doctor. The son of a lecher, a sly lecher, a canting vulgar evangelizing lecher who creeps into the beds of little children. Does it matter? asks the reasonable doctor.

Thank God I ran him down—the dirty rat! A lecher got me, on the body of my wife. I was cuckolded in the act of my begetting. Fooled and tricked and betrayed. A freak and an outcast. God's dirty dupe. God's masterpiece. My wife is my mother and my children are the fruit of incest. Who cares? Not the dear doctor! Oh no no! Everything, says the dear doctor, is right and good."

He became aware of something touching him, pressing against him. Drusilla embraced his knees, her tear-blinded eyes searching for his. "My poor Robert! My poor darling Robert!"

He started away from her. "Keep your hands off me! Mother!"

Tom struggled out of his chair and moved heavily into the circle. "Nay, Robert my boy, that's not the way to do. It's a queer bad business, God knows, but this kind of craziness won't mend it." There was the sound of the door opening, but only Tom turned to look. "See here! There's a young lady to see us."

Margaret stood hesitating in the doorway. Behind her, ignoring her commands, were John and Judith.

"I heard a noise," said Margaret. "Is anything the matter?"

"Hal!" cried Robert, wheeling round upon her. "Come in, my darlings! Come in, my pretty flesh! Come and embrace your brother!" His eyes were dimmed; he stared sightlessly in the direction of the young voice. "Matter, you say! There's no matter! Rape's the matter. Incest's the matter. But what does that matter? Ask the dear doctor. He'll tell you. Ask my mother-wife." He came lurching and groping towards the door. "Thank God I can't see you, my children!" he cried at last, his voice swelling and breaking.

Margaret, in terror, slipped past him into the room. The younger ones, with frightened eyes and clinging hands, pulled each other out of his way and let him pass. They ran into the room after Margaret. John slammed the door to, and leaned his slim weight upon it.

Margaret was on her knees, holding Drusilla's head against her young small breasts. "Mother! Darling! What is it? Are you ill?"

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## A SOUL IN FLIGHT

IN ALL the chaos of Robert's whirling brain one thing alone was constant, one desire remained to give coherence to what was yet to be done. He longed only to get away, away from the house of his humiliation, away from the country of his hated birth, away from his very self that was poisoned at its source. He groped for the door that should release him from this imprisoning house; after some fumbling found and opened it; and jerked forward by the fury within him and behind him half-fell half-staggered down the steps. The sharp touch of the April air restored some part of his sight. Sunshine he could not see; colour was drained from the earth; but the path, the lawn, the crowding trees, the hedges, the wavering road, these he could make out, as grey looming shapes running liquidly to meet him. They came quickly and more quickly; his heart thundered, and pain swelled in his lungs. He must go away,

away. He must go to Colonus. He must go to a dark quiet place where pride could lie down and sleep and be at rest, the body broken, the soil scattered, the shame lost. A car flashed past him, and he came for an instant to the surface of consciousness. The car was a diminishing black speck. He ran and ran. The pain in his mind was one with the pain, the bursting pain, in his body. He lived a hundred lives, sleeping and waking but always running. He slept and dreamed, while his body still ran on; slept, and dreamed, and woke again, again, to the intolerable light of his knowledge. He encountered some human figures, two or three, and did not wait to see them stop and stare after him; but when at last he observed a town moving drunkenly towards him, a street of buildings, vehicles, people, he came to himself, remembered his manners, remembered above all that he must not make himself conspicuous. I'm a spectacle: people are staring. Even now that thought could prick him; even now there was a shudder left in his heart. He slackened his pace and studied to be normal, walking soberly, intently, towards a point which his brother-in-law Philip, from another direction, was fast approaching.

Arrived at the railway station, twenty minutes later, he went straight to the booking-office window, with money in his hand. He was smiling to himself, a sly half-wistful smile. In his new-found purpose there was an unexpected balm.

"Good evening," he said to the booking-clerk. Was that my voice that spoke? How odd. How interesting. "Would you mind telling me"—he was all urbanity—"when does the next down train come in?"

While waiting for the answer he looked round in search of the station clock.



"Let me see. Yes, it's due in three minutes, sir."

"Ah, I'm just in time." What a pleasant fellow this is. And how cunning I am. "From Liverpool Street?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Now I want a ticket."

"Where for, sir?"

The booking-office swayed slightly. "Colonus," said Robert. "Single."

"*Where* for?"

"Bishop's Stortford," said Robert. He observed the man's curious stare. "Forgive me. I'm a little absent-minded today. I've had a shock."

The booking-clerk hesitated. "Bishop's Stortford is on the up line, you know."

"Yes. Oh yes. That's all right."

Eagerly, but with careful deliberation, he received his ticket and his change. He showed the ticket at the barrier, had it clipped, and passed through to the platform. Life was suddenly and marvellously simple, everything being arranged. Turning to his right he walked up and up the long platform. As he neared the remote end of it he glanced back over his shoulder and noticed with satisfaction that he was now virtually alone, the other prospective passengers, the nearest group of them, being congregated some twenty or thirty yards away. I am going a long journey, he said. Looking towards London he saw the train approaching.

Philip Moore, as his train entered the station, rose from his corner-seat, opened the window, and lifted his suitcase from the luggage rack. In his pocket was a letter, which, simple and brief though it was, he had taken from its envelope and read through more than once during the jour-

ney from London. Dear Philip, Mother and I are rather frightened about Father. I wish you would come and see us. Please come *soon*. Your affectionate niece, Margaret. Had she said a little more, or a little less, he might have persuaded himself that it was unnecessary, for the sake of humouring a young girl's fancy, to drag himself from work at this of all moments, when he had just succeeded, with much difficulty, in attaching himself to it. But Margaret's written words, and the image of herself that they evoked in him, had proved too potent an incantation; and grumbling to himself he had abandoned his jealous Muse, knowing from bitter experience that he was doomed to be coldly received and tardily forgiven on his return to her.

The train drew in and came to a standstill. As he opened the carriage door he heard a shouting and a silence and a hurrying of feet. Men were pointing towards him; women were covering their faces. People came running, porters and passengers: a group quickly collected on the platform.

Philip stepped out, nearly touching as he did so a man who knelt at the platform's edge, peering under the train.

The man got up, mechanically dusted his knees. "He's down there. He's done for."

Philip leaned forward, looked, and saw.

"My God!" His voice betrayed recognition, but it passed unnoticed.

He stood for a moment stunned and stupid, and for another moment lost in rapid thought. He paid no attention to the voices about him, the hurrying to and fro. He covered his eyes, as if to shut out what he had seen.

Somebody called for a doctor.

"He needs no doctor," said Philip.

A porter jostled him. "Don't stand there. You're in the way."

Philip picked his way through the gathering crowd and walked thoughtfully out of the station.

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## PHILIP TAKES CHARGE

MARGARET, with her arms round Drusilla, holding her, rocking her, hushing her wild grief with maternal murmurings, was a child no longer and could never be wholly a child again. She did not understand what had happened; nor did she ask for enlightenment. She knew only that her mother was broken and comfortless, her wisdom forgotten, her beauty ravaged, her pride brought low; and all the girl's budding womanhood was gathered into the flower of this moment. She felt, a moment later, the clinging hands relax, the head fall limp, and with a quick glance at her grandfather she whispered: "I think she's fainting, Grandpa." Between them, with Tom in anxious attendance, they got her to the settee and laid her down. "Not fainted," murmured Dr Hewish. "It will be all right." At ever increasing intervals a convulsive sob shuddered through the prone body. The eyes were shut, the hands tightly clenched. The doctor hovered, watchful and alert. He was restored to himself, having work to do.

Tom turned his attention to the smaller ones.

"Suppose you and me take a little walk?" he said persuasively. He put an arm round John's shoulder and offered a brawny hand to Judith. He too had found a job to do, and his heart lightened. "She'll soon be better, the doctor says. Come along, my pretties!"

John met his look steadily, not offering to move. "Are you our grandfather?"

"That's the ticket, lad," said Tom. There had been enough truth spoken for one day, he reflected. "And I don't even know your name. There's a rum show!"

For a moment the decision hung in the balance. The boy exchanged glances with Margaret, who nodded and smiled and said: "Please do, Johnny."

"Oh all right!" said John. With hands thrust deep in the pockets of his shorts, and scowling because he had been seen crying, he followed Tom and Judith out of the room, turning at the door to say, with a last glance towards his mother: "If you want us, Margaret, we'll be in the garden."

After the children had gone there was silence for a long while, and at last it seemed that Drusilla was sleeping. But at a movement of Margaret's, soundless and imponderable though it was, she opened her eyes.

"Is Grandpa there?" she asked.

"I'm here, my dear," said Dr Hewish.

"You told me it was dead, that baby."

"Yes." He could offer no defence.

"It was clever of you. Mother too. She told me it was dead."

"We thought it the best way out," said Dr Hewish. "Try not to think about it now."

"How long have you known that Robert is . . . what he is?"

"A long time. A long time. Ever since you told me his name."

"I told you his name?" She missed his meaning.

"The night we had supper together. In Charlotte Street, wasn't it? The night of the air raid. Do you remember?"

She did not answer. But after a moment's silence she said: "Yet you let it go on."

He said firmly: "You had Margaret in your womb, my dear."

Margaret, mystified and loving, moved nearer and nestled close. She stretched out a hand to her mother.

"Dear Margaret!" said Drusilla. Her rigid calm crumpled. She turned her face away. "If only I'd died then!" The idea of death brought suddenly a new light into her eyes. "Will it help poor Robert if I die?"

"Listen, my dear child. Nothing can help Robert if Robert won't. Nothing and no one. With another man it might have been different. Take Philip now." The doctor's tone became conversational: he welcomed the chance of leading her thoughts away from Robert. "Philip has poise, balance, humour. Philip has none of that hungry self-consuming pride. He's your brother, my dear."

"And Robert is my son," said Drusilla, cold in despair.

The old man felt Margaret start and stiffen. His arm tightened about her young shoulders.

"Where is he now?" Drusilla asked.

"We don't know." He looked at her steadily and with meaning, holding her gaze, calling on her courage. "I think perhaps he has gone away."

"Please find him," said Drusilla. "Find him. Stay with him." She shuddered at her fears. "But don't let him come here unless . . . unless he wants me."

"If he's still in the house . . ." said Dr Hewish. He went slowly out of the room.

He was a very old man, old and spent. He dragged his weariness from room to room, searching for the man he was afraid to find. I've lived too long, he thought: I've seen too much. Yesterday he had been mellow, mellow and still vigorous, with sunlight flowing in his veins; but now the long tale of his years was a burden too grievous to be borne. Too long, too much; let me lie down and be at peace.

Finding the house to be empty of Robert he stood at the stairhead, lost in musing, remembering his dead wife, and remembering the child Drusilla, in whom she lived again.

The sound of knocking dragged him from his dreams. There was someone at the front door, and the thought was like a trumpet, calling him to his last battle. He stumbled down the stairs and ran to the door with arms raised, as if to repel an invader.

The knocking came again, louder, impatient. She will hear it, he thought. I must open the door.

Annie appeared, coming from the kitchen. He waved her away, and put his hand to the door, and opened it.

Philip Moore stepped over the threshold. "Hullo, father! It's good to see you."

"Ah, Philip!" He gave Philip a trembling hand, and with the other he shaded his eyes, steadying himself. "Thank God it's you, my boy! I thought it was Robert come back."



— A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH —  
— THIS BOOK IS SET —

*The text of this book was set on the linotype in Baskerville. The punches for this face were cut under the supervision of George W. Jones, an eminent English printer. Linotype Baskerville is a facsimile cutting from type cast from the original matrices of a face designed by John Baskerville. The original face was the forerunner of the "modern" group of type faces. ¶ John Baskerville (1706-75), of Birmingham, England, a writing-master, with a special renown for cutting inscriptions in stone, began experimenting about 1750 with punch-cutting and making typographical material. It was not until 1757 that he published his first work, a Virgil in royal quarto, with great-primer letters. This was followed by his famous editions of Milton, the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and several Latin classic authors. His types, at first criticized as unnecessarily slender, delicate, and feminine, in time were recognized as both distinct and elegant, and both his types and his printing were greatly admired. Printers, however, preferred the stronger types of Caslon, and Baskerville before his death repented of having attempted the business of printing. For four years after his death his widow continued to conduct his business. She then sold all his punches and matrices to the Société Littéraire-typographique, which used some of the types for the sumptuous Kehl edition of Vol-taire's works in seventy volumes.—*

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